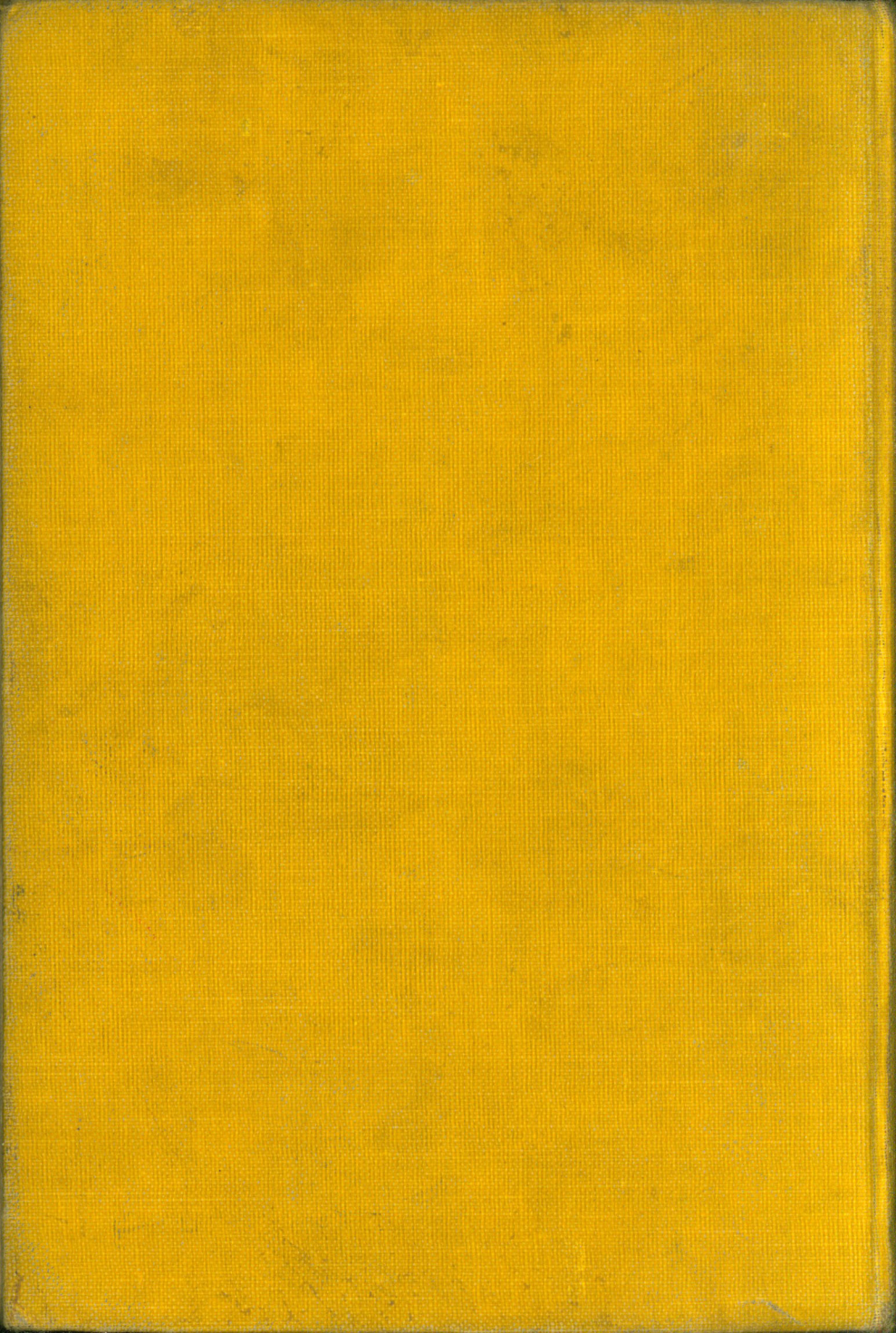


THE MINUTE BOYS OF LEXINGTON



BY · EDWARD · STRATEMEYER



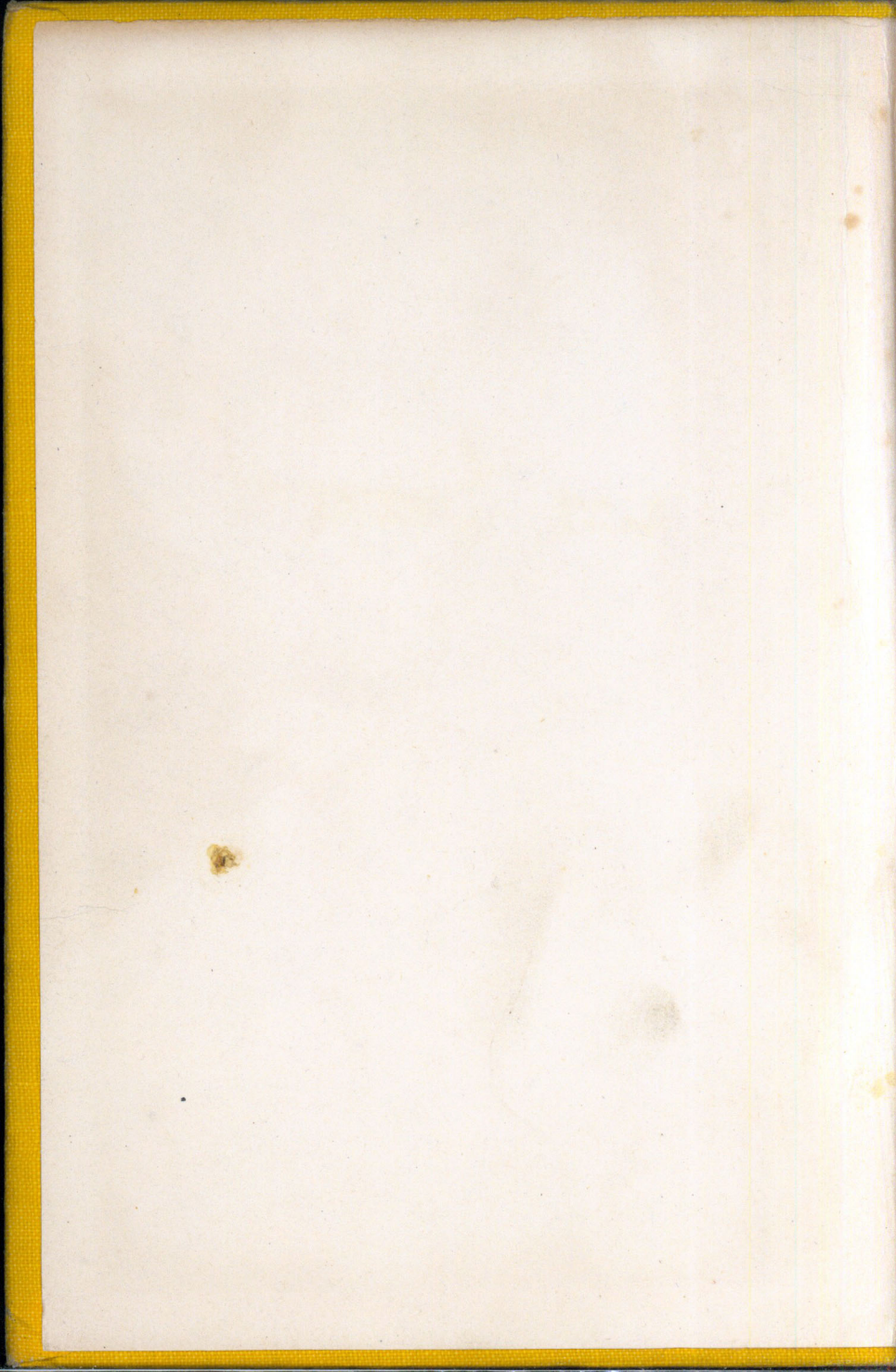
THE
MINUTE
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LEXING
TON

BY
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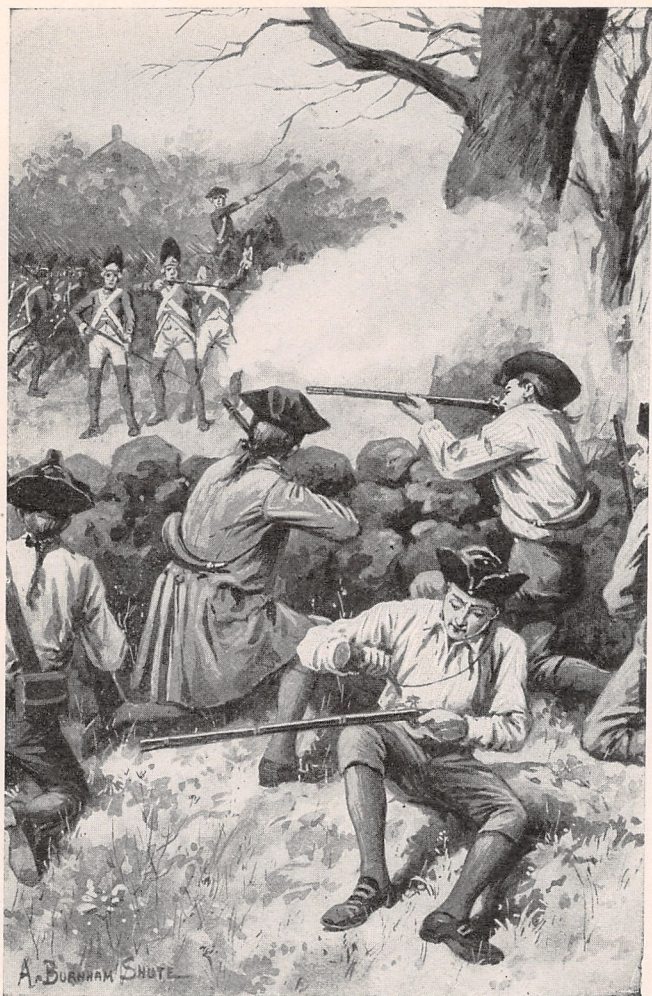
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The Minute Boys of Bunker Hill
The Minute Boys of Lexington

THE PAGE COMPANY
53 BEACON STREET BOSTON, MASS.



"SOME OF THE MINUTE MEN HAD SOUGHT THE SHELTER
OF STONE WALLS AND TREES."

THE MINUTE BOYS OF LEXINGTON

BY
EDWARD STRATEMEYER.

AUTHOR OF
"BOUND TO BE AN ELECTRICIAN," "YOUNG AUCTIONEERS,"
"BOUND TO SUCCEED SERIES," "SHIP
AND SHORE SERIES," ETC.

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THE
MINUTE BOYS OF LEXINGTON.

CHAPTER I.

A STIRRING ENCOUNTER ON THE ROAD.

"GET out of the way, boy, and let us pass."

"I can't move out, sir. I am on the edge of the road now, and I might go over into the ditch."

"Nonsense! Steer your ox-team to one side, and be quick about it, or I'll give you one over the back with my sword." And as the British under officer spoke, he drew the blade in question and shook it suggestively at the youth addressed, who sat astride of one of the oxen he was driving, attached to a load of corn fodder.

The eyes of the boy flashed angrily. He was an American, born and bred, and had no love for these soldiers who were parading around Boston and vicinity, making the peacefully inclined inhab-

itants obey the obnoxious laws of King George III. The fact that there were six redcoats in the detachment he had met did not daunt him.

"I have a right to half the roadway," he said, quietly but firmly. "There is plenty of room for you to pass."

"Ha! don't talk back to me!" came in a harsher tone than before. "Steer out your team instantly!"

"I can't do it, sir."

The words were not spoken with any great amount of defiance, yet they threw the under officer, who was in a bad humour generally, into a rage. He leaped forward, and up went the heavy sword, to fall with a resounding whack upon the youth's back, a cruel and uncalled-for attack which all but sent the lad to the ground.

A coarse laugh went up from the remaining soldiers, each of whom was armed with a shining flint-lock musket and bayonet. They were boon companions, and on a little expedition like this did not look upon the under officer in the light of a superior.

"That's the way to serve him, Sergeant Kegan!" cried one. "Give him a taste of the King's discipline!"

"We'll show these rebels they must obey," put in another.

"You are right, we will, men. By my sword,

but what are we coming to when even the youngsters won't obey us!"

And the sergeant drew himself up to his full height, for, being an officer in the King's command, and out on a special mission, he deemed himself of considerable importance.

The scene of the encounter was on the road leading from Lexington to Concord. It was about the middle of April, 1775, and at that season of the year the highway in certain spots was well-nigh impassible. The boy with the ox-team and the detachment of British soldiery had met where there was a sharp turn and a ditch, and the lad knew only too well that if he attempted to do as ordered he would wreck his farm wagon and scatter his load of corn fodder in the mud.

He had given the men their full half of the road, and, as they were on foot, they could readily have passed him had they moved along in single file. Any officer who was a gentleman would have commanded his men to do this, but Sergeant Kegan, who had obtained his position more by luck than by worthiness, was the exact opposite of a gentleman, and hence the scene described above.

The youth who had been attacked was lightly attired in homespun, and the blow from the sword hurt him not a little, while it deprived him for several seconds of his wind. A clutch at the ox-

yoke saved him from falling, and there he hung, while the soldiers passed the remarks recorded.

"I take it you will get out of the way, now," went on Sergeant Kegan, in fully as harsh a tone as before.

"You — you brute!" gasped the lad, as soon as he could speak. "If you were not a British officer I would — would —"

"Silence! Move now, or take the consequences!"

The face of the youth grew pale, but his voice did not falter, and he looked his persecutor squarely in the eyes.

"I have moved to one side as far as I can in safety. I can do no more, sir."

"You — you whipper-snapper! How dare you speak to a King's officer in this fashion? I'll teach you a lesson in manners. Take that! And that! And — oh!"

Twice had the sword been raised and twice had it fallen on the youth's shoulder. Now, as it was uplifted a third time, the boy dodged and the weapon hit the nearest ox. With a bellow, the beast turned and knocked the under officer flat on his back.

"Hi! hi! stop the creature! Secure that boy! He made the ox attack me!" cried the sergeant, as he scrambled to his feet. "The young rascal shall be hung for this!"

Alarmed at the attack on their superior, the remaining redcoats rushed forward. One stopped the ox-team, while the others turned their attention to the boy. In a twinkle the lad was hauled to the ground and surrounded. He struggled to escape, but he was no match for the men, and, with one clasp ing him around the chest from behind and two others at either side of him, he speedily found himself a prisoner.

This accomplished, the soldiers turned to their officer. He had received a deep scratch on the neck from the horn of the ox, and, standing on the sword, which had fallen beneath him, the officer bound it up with his handkerchief.

"Here is your sword, sir," said one of the men, and, wiping the mud from the blade, he passed it to his superior.

"Is he — have you the young villain tight?"

"Oh, yes, we've got him right enough," sang out two of the soldiers, who held the boy.

"That's good, — don't let him escape." The sergeant turned to the prisoner, who was panting deeply from his efforts to escape. "You whelp, do you know what you have done?"

"I've treated a brute as he deserved," was the somewhat reckless reply.

"You have attacked an officer of his most gracious Majesty King George, and you are liable to be hung for it!"

"I merely defended myself, sir. Every one has a right to do that."

"I ordered you to clear the road."

"And I couldn't do it unless I ran the risk of breaking my wagon, and dumping my load."

"I won't waste words with you." The sergeant turned to his men. "Bind his arms behind him, and make him come along. He shall pay dearly for this attack upon me, and for his insolence."

"Yes, sir. But what's to do with the team and the load?" asked one of the soldiers.

"Leave them where they stand. I don't care what becomes of them. These dirty Yankees must be taught a lesson. Come, hurry up, or the day will be gone before our mission is accomplished."

"What are you going to do with me?" demanded the youth, as he was being bound with a rope from his own fodder load.

"You'll find out soon enough."

"I won't go along."

"Won't you?" sneered the sergeant. "We'll see. Men, give him a taste of your bayonets."

The soldiers did as directed, and the sharp points, jabbed here and there, soon caused the blood to flow from a dozen tiny wounds. That he might not run off, a soldier remained at either side of the youth, with a tight clasp of his wrist.

It was still early morning, and but a few people

living on the farms between Lexington and Concord were stirring. A heavy mist lay over the broad fields, cutting off every distant view. The boy looked around for assistance, but none was at hand. The nearest farmhouse was an eighth of a mile away. He was truly in the hands of the enemy.

Finding there was no help for it, he moved along, as his captors directed. He had been driving towards Lexington, but now he was turned in the direction of Concord. Less than half a mile was covered, when the party left the highway and passed through a small belt of timber land. On the other side of the timber was a clearing, where stood a small, square stone house, the owner and sole inhabitant of which had but recently died.

Going to the heavy oaken door, the soldiers pushed it open, and the whole party entered. It was a gloomy interior, for the house had been built more to resist the attacks of the Indians than for comfort. With a flint and steel a firebrand was lighted, and then a blaze was started in the broad fireplace, something which made the interior of the shelter far more comfortable than it would otherwise have been.

"Bind the boy to yonder cupboard door," said the sergeant, as soon as the fire had been lighted. "I think I know of a way to make him useful to us."

The soldiers immediately did as commanded, and so tightly did they fasten the bonds that, had the lad been less courageous, he must have cried out with pain. But he would have gone through twice as much rather than let these British soldiers see how they were making him suffer.

The work of securing the young prisoner having been finished, the under officer and his men withdrew to another apartment for a brief consultation. Soon they filed in again.

"Now, then, if you wish to come to terms, I'll give you the chance," said the sergeant to the youth. "And remember," he added, impressively, "if you will not come to terms, I will take you back to Boston with me, make a complaint to General Gage, and have you put in prison!"

CHAPTER II.

WHAT LED TO THE FIGHT.

BEFORE proceeding further with this tale of the stirring events leading up to our War of the Revolution, I would ask my young readers to go back with me a bit, that we may more clearly understand the situation in the early part of the year 1775.

For a long while, in fact since Canada had fallen into the hands of Great Britain, and peace had been declared between the French and the English, trouble had been brewing between our colonies and the mother country, until now the trouble could very well be compared to a mine of gunpowder which needed only a spark to touch it off.

At first, in 1765, had come the obnoxious Stamp Act. Needing money, and feeling that our colonies were growing too rich to be easily managed, the British Parliament passed a law imposing a stamp tax on all legal and insurance papers, bills, and the like, as well as a tax on every newspaper, and every advertisement therein, and upon every

almanac or calendar, whether written or printed; and even went so far as to set this stamp tax upon all the wages paid to clerks and apprentices! The stamp duties ran from twopence to several pounds.

It was not supposed that our colonies would take to this act graciously, and strong efforts were put forth to uphold the law. But this availed nothing. The people would not support the act. They gathered together, not only in Boston, but in all other places, and denounced the law; and when the stamps were sent over, they confiscated a larger portion of them, and burnt them up. The few persons who were willing to submit were branded as traitors to the cause of personal liberty. Petitions were sent to England, and at last the Stamp Act was repealed.

The news of the repeal was hailed with much joy, and all went smoothly until about the middle of 1767, when another law was passed in England putting a duty on tea and several other articles imported into America. This law was very craftily devised, and it was imagined that the colonists would submit easily, especially as the duty on tea was to be but threepence a pound and the tea was to be sold ninepence per pound cheaper than in England. But the English lawmakers of that time, who were neither as wise nor as just as those who came later, failed to take into consid-

eration this important fact: that our forefathers were fighting, not for pounds and pence, but for principle.

The principle was, No taxation without representation, — in other words, so long as England refused to allow us to govern ourselves, or to send representatives to England, just so long should we be allowed to go our own way and use our money as we saw fit. If at that time England had allowed us proper representation in her Parliament and in her courts, it is doubtful if our United States would be separated from her to-day.

In Boston the excitement ran high. On a large open space called Liberty Hall, situated at what is now the junction of Washington and Essex Streets, there stood a magnificent elm known as Liberty Tree, through the upper branches of which was thrust a long flagstaff, where at certain times floated the well-known Pine-tree flag. Around this tree there was held a long and bitter meeting denouncing the tax on tea. Two days later another meeting was held, presided over by John Hancock, afterwards a signer of the Declaration of Independence, and a committee was sent to the consignees of some tea, asking them to give up their positions in the affair. They refused, and then when the tea came into port a body of men was sent to the wharf with strict orders to resist every effort to land the stuff.

The excitement was now at a fever-heat, and another meeting of the people was held at the Old South Meeting-house. The owners of the vessels with tea were sent for and asked to leave port, but the collector refused to give them clearance papers. Next the governor was appealed to, but in vain. Finally, as it was growing dark, a war-whoop sounded out in the gallery of the meeting-house, and a man appeared, disguised as an Indian.

"To Griffin's Wharf! To Griffin's Wharf!" came the call, and it was taken up by many inside and by nearly all of those without. A rush was made down the street, to where the tea ships lay tied up. Fifty men, most of them in disguise as Indians, boarded the vessels, broke open three hundred and forty-two chests of tea, and threw their contents into the harbour. Not a single pound was spared.

—The decided course taken by the patriots of Boston caused a great commotion in England, where in some quarters it was thought we had already gone to war. The destruction of the tea was bitterly denounced, and a law was passed closing Boston as a port of entry, so that it should not be lawful for any vessel to unload or take on a cargo there. To carry out this new law, General Gage, of the British army, was appointed governor of Massachusetts, to take the place of Governor Hutchinson. He came over

with four regiments of soldiers, a body of men which was soon increased by the addition of regiments from Ireland, New York, Quebec, and Halifax.

As the number of British soldiers in Boston increased, so did the murmurs of the colonists. In addition to upholding the law which closed the town as a port of entry, General Gage was expected to sustain the British court officers who had been appointed to operate the colonial courts. But this he could not do, for in the smaller towns and villages the British judges were forced either to resign their positions, or flee to Boston for protection.

Such was the state of affairs in 1774, and now the colonists, realising more and more every day that matters were not likely to be settled saving by an appeal to arms, set about arming themselves and gathering military stores. In Boston the tradespeople and apprentices formed themselves into a semi-secret body known as the Sons of Liberty, and outside of the town the militia were augmented by volunteers called minute men, because they stood ready to serve at a minute's notice. The militia and minute men were particularly well organised in Lexington, Concord, Winchester, Salem, and other places about Boston, and these hardy patriots, realising that they would be the first called upon whenever the tocsin of

war sounded forth from Boston, went into "training," or drilling, every day, and secreted every pound of powder and ball which came within their reach.

Of course these movements could not be kept from the eyes and ears of General Gage and his spies, and it was determined by the British officer to secure without delay such powder and ball as could be reached. Accordingly a raid was made on a powder-magazine at Quarry Hill, in Charlestown, and two hundred and fifty half-casks of powder were secured, while a detachment of the British soldiers went to Cambridge and carried off two small cannon. These movements brought the excitement again to a fever-heat, and many were for making an attack and recapturing the stuff taken. "We'll tear old Boston inside out before we will submit," was the way one old patriot expressed himself; but cooler counsel prevailed, and no fighting was just then done. Yet large quantities of military stores were carried from Boston and Charlestown in secret, to be hidden where they would be most available should war really come.

It was not long after this that General Gage began to fortify Boston Neck, the long, low, and marshy expanse of land uniting the town to the mainland. The selectmen of the town called upon him, asking what he meant by such warlike action

and by allowing his officers and men to treat the inhabitants so rudely; but to both of these inquiries no satisfactory answer was given, and the work on the fortifications went on as rapidly as possible, although this is not saying much, for the British general could not get a Boston workman to labour for him, no matter what wages were offered, and even though, through the excitement and from the fact that Boston harbour was closed, the workmen were next to idle and almost penniless.

The winter of 1774-75 was a dismal and nerve-trying one, not only to the seventeen thousand people living in the town, but also to the thousands living for many miles around. In the harbour not a vessel was stirring, outside of those belonging to the British navy. Did a farmer attempt to carry a load of hay, or some sheep, from one of the numerous islands to the mainland, one of the King's boats would swoop down upon him, confiscate his goods, and throw him into prison. Vessels sent from New York or Charleston, or elsewhere, were turned back with their cargoes. All of the great warehouses near to the Long Wharf were closed up. Business came almost to a standstill, and, night and morning, people stood around wondering what would happen next, or gathered together at the various secret meeting-places to plot to throw off the galling British yoke. In disgust many left the city, taking their

goods with them. The commons were filled with the tents of the soldiers, and the British troops paraded every day.

Early in the year in which this story is laid, General Gage felt he must act, and act quickly, if anything was to be done to subdue the uprising which was threatening on every hand. Some of the Tories of Marshfield had formed an association swearing fidelity to the King. It was rumoured that the patriots intended to force these Tories to recant, and a body of the King's troops were marched to Marshfield to preserve order. But when the troops arrived, the trouble was over, and there was nothing for them to do. They remained, however, in Marshfield until that memorable day in Lexington, — that day never to be forgotten by the hero of this story and his friends.

The next expedition of General Gage's troops was to Salem, where a small quantity of artillery was stored. Here there was almost a pitched battle, but a clergyman, the Reverend Mr. Barnard, interfered, and quietness was restored. But the country was aroused, and the minute men arrived just as the British troops quit Salem.

In the meantime, matters in Boston were growing worse and worse. One patriot, accused of tempting a British soldier to desert, was tarred and feathered, and the inhabitants were made to suffer all sorts of insults from both officers and

privates. More people than ever began to leave, many joining their friends and relatives in the villages close by, and breathing vengeance on the heads of those who had caused them such sufferings and loss.

Such was the condition of affairs at the time when my story opens. What new movements General Gage made to harass the people, and how these movements were met by the brave patriots of Lexington, Concord, and elsewhere, and what important parts the youthful heroes of this tale played, will be told in the immediate pages which follow. As it is, I am afraid I have left our hero too long a prisoner of the detachment of British soldiers, and so we will return to him without further delay.

CHAPTER III.

THE SECRETS OF THE MINUTE MEN.

"If you will not come to terms, I will take you back to Boston with me, make a complaint to General Gage, and have you put in prison!"

Such had been the words of the British under officer, and a deathlike silence followed. The man expected the youthful prisoner to quail before his stern gaze, but the lad did not flinch or change colour. He was of the stuff of which patriots the world over are made, — such patriots as have made our glorious country what it is.

"Well, what do you say?" demanded the sergeant, at length, seeing the boy did not reply.

"I do not understand what you mean by coming to terms."

"You will soon learn. I will ask you a few questions first. What is your name?"

"I am not ashamed to tell you that. It is Roger Morse."

"Where do you live?"

"On the outskirts of Lexington, near the Boston road."

"How old are you?"

"I was sixteen last winter."

"Old enough to know what your confounded minute men are up to, eh?" went on the British officer, suggestively.

To this Roger Morse did not reply. But a quick, shrewd look passed over his intelligent face, a look which did not escape Sergeant Kegan's searching gaze.

"How many are there in your family?"

"There are three of us, not counting our hired man: my mother, my sister, and myself."

"Where is your father?"

At this question, so roughly delivered, the eyes of the boy grew suspiciously moist.

"He is dead," he answered, in a low voice. "He died from a bullet wound received in the Canadian war."

"Humph! I see where your fighting spirit comes from. But let me tell you that it will all be wasted if you Yankees attempt to take up arms against the King."

"We don't want to fight, — we only want our rights," said Roger, with unusual earnestness for one so young. "England hasn't any right to tax her colonies without representation."

"Bah, boy! you talk like a parrot!"

"I speak the truth, sir."

"I won't attempt to argue with one so young, — and foolish. But since you appear to know so much of these matters of state, I presume you know of other things of equal importance. Tell me, have you joined the minute men?"

"No; I'm so young they won't take me."

"Ha! then you won't deny that you have tried to join?"

"Why should I? It is nothing to be ashamed of. If we are treated fairly we will make the Crown no trouble."

"And who is to be the judge of what is fair and what is not?"

"Fair is fair, the world over, sir."

"Where do the minute men of this district meet?" went on the British officer, as coolly as he could. To him the question was an all-important one.

"I cannot tell you that."

"Do you mean to say you don't know?"

"I cannot tell you."

"Have the men much powder and ball stored away?"

"I must refuse to answer."

"How many men of Lexington have enlisted, so far as you know?"

To the last question Roger remained silent.

"Answer me, you whelp!" cried the British

under officer, his tone changing to one of great harshness. "Remember what I said about a court martial before General Gage."

"I have nothing to say, sir."

"You won't speak?"

"No, sir. I would rather cut out my tongue than be disloyal to my country."

"I'll make you speak, mark my words!" came in a rage from the sergeant. "Here, Nelson, Stubbs, take off his coat and shirt, and I'll warrant we'll soon bring the whelp to terms!"

"What are you going to do, sergeant, give him a lashing?"

"That's it, — and on his bare back. I'll teach these accursed Yankees that a British officer must be obeyed. Quick, off with his clothes."

The two soldiers designated sprang in, and in less than five minutes Roger stood bared to the waist, the blood still flowing from a bayonet prick in his shoulder.

"Now, one of you hunt me up a whip or a bit of stout rope," went on the British sergeant. "And don't be long, for we must soon be on our way to Concord."

In less than a minute a rope's-end was handed to the under officer, and going up to Roger, he flourished it in the youth's face.

"Do you see this?" he snarled. "You are

going to feel it in a minute more, unless you change your mind and speak up."

"I'll not answer your questions," was the firm reply. "And if you strike me with that, you will regret it, mark my words!"

"Bah, you young rebel, do you think you can scare me? I'll give you just five minutes in which to change your mind."

"You have no right to treat me in this fashion."

"I'll take the right." There was another painful pause. "Are you going to answer me now? No? Then take that!"

The heavy rope's-end whirled through the air and came down with a sickening swish on the youth's bare back. The blow left a livid streak behind, and the sufferer gave a gasp which could not be suppressed.

"Now will you speak?"

"No, never!" was the stubborn response. "You can do your worst; I'll not open my lips."

Again the rope's-end was raised. But ere it could fall an interruption occurred. From the woods beyond the stone house came a musket-shot, presently followed by another.

"Ha! what does that mean?" cried the British under officer, starting back and allowing the rope's-end to drop to his side. "Can it be possible our general's plans have been discovered?" he went on, in a whisper to his companions.

"There goes another shot, sergeant!" ejaculated one of the soldiers. "Something is wrong, that is certain."

"We must be on our way to Concord, men. Confound the luck, I can get nothing out of this whelp!"

"What shall we do with him? We cannot take him along, and to let him go after what he has seen and heard —"

"Would be foolhardy, Drake. For a mug of flip I would run him through with my sword, — but perhaps it will be as well to spare his life. I have it. Bind and gag him and pitch him in some out-of-the-way spot."

"There is a little cellar under the parlour of the house," put in another redcoat. "We can dump him into that. But we'll have to come back for him, or he will starve to death."

"Starve? Hardly," came from the sergeant, harshly. "These rebels are like rats, — sly and hard to kill off. Do as you suggest, and be quick about it. For all we know, the whole country may be in alarm by this time."

A gag was easily made of cloth and stuffed into Roger's mouth. Then he was cut loose from the cupboard door and his hands and feet were more firmly bound than ever. This accomplished, the door leading to the cellar was opened, and two of the soldiers picked up his form and carried it

below, throwing him upon a heap of damp rubbish in a corner. The clothing taken off was cast beside him, and the door was closed and bolted.

For a minute or two he lay, partly stunned, where he had fallen. He heard a vague tramping overhead. This soon ceased, and then he realised that he was a close prisoner, and utterly alone.

His back smarted as it had never smarted before, and to relieve the pain he turned over upon his breast. He tried to loosen his hands and to force the gag from his mouth, but his efforts were unavailing. Moreover, it was impossible for him to stand up, his knees having been doubled up and his ankles fastened to a rope passed around his waist.

Slowly the minutes dragged by, lengthening into hours, and still he remained unable to help himself. He wondered what those at home would think of his absence, what would become of the ox-team and the wagon, and if his tormentors would return, or leave him to die of starvation. Fervidly he prayed to heaven for escape, not once, but many times, and the final prayer had just been finished when he again heard footsteps overhead.

CHAPTER IV.

HEN PEABODY MAKES A DISCOVERY.

"HEN!"

"Yes, Miss Dorothy."

"Have you seen anything of Roger this morning? He went over to Acton, you know, for corn fodder from Barton's."

"Hain't seen hide nor hair o' him, Miss Dorothy," was the reply, coming from a tall, thin man, with an unusually long nose, as he stepped up to the back door of the Morse homestead. "He told me yesterday tew go right on with thet ploughin' up tew the turnip lot, and I allowed ez he would be back afore this."

"I cannot understand it," said Dorothy Morse, with a grave shake of her head. "I trust nothing has happened to him."

"Oh, don't ye go fer tew worry 'bout him, Miss Dorothy. Roger is full an' able tew take care on himself."

"I know, Hen, but in these times, with those dreadful British soldiers flying all over the country, it isn't like it used to be."

"No, wuss luck, it ain't. But don't ye worry, — he's all right, depend on't," answered the hired man, with a confident jerk of his long, thin face.

As Roger had told Sergeant Kegan, the Morse family were three in number, — mother, daughter, and son. The mother was a lady of forty-five, who had been born and bred in Boston. Her father had been a manufacturer of plate-ware, a well-esteemed citizen with a large circle of friends, among whom were Samuel Adams, John Hancock, and Doctor Warren, now at the head, politically, of colonial affairs in and about the town. On the death of her parents she had come to live with an old aunt in Lexington, and it was here she had met and married Roger's father.

At that time Alexander Morse had been a prosperous farmer, owning not alone his farm on the Boston road, but also a tract of land at Concord, six miles distant. But the spirit of adventure and patriotism had led him to join the army, and he had fought and died as Roger had related. His sickness, and the subsequent sickness of his wife, had entailed a heavy expense upon the family, and soon the land at Concord was sold to pay outstanding bills.

Dorothy was now eighteen years of age, tall and slender, with a sweet Puritan face which was as pretty and refined as any in the neighbourhood. As her mother was far from strong, the girl took

the entire care of the household on her shoulders, leaving Roger to look after the farm, with Hen to help him.

Although but a boy in years, Roger was now almost a man, so far as work and a knowledge of what was best to do about the farm were concerned. It was Roger who directed the field work, who sold the produce, and who bought the supplies. His ability to do was never questioned, and the mother, lying so often upon her bed of sickness, thanked God for having given her such a son.

Of Hen whole pages might be written, but I would prefer to have the tall, lean man from the Green Mountain district speak for himself. Let it be sufficient, then, to state that this highly original individual had been attached to the Morse family as "hired help" for ten years, that he was honest to the backbone, that he was looked upon almost as a member of the household, and that he thought Roger the best boy in the whole wide world.

Hen had been called to bring some water from the well, which stood some distance from the house. Now, as he came back, he asked after Mrs. Morse, for the lady had been taken down with one of her sick spells several days previous, an illness which had almost caused Roger to give up his proposed and necessary trip to Acton.

"Mother is much better, but still very weak," replied Dorothy. And then she added, as she took the water, "I wish you would walk up the road, and see if you can learn anything of Roger. Perhaps he has been stuck in the mire."

"Thet might be so, Miss Dorothy. I'll go ez soon ez I can git these butes greased. Will you be so kind ez to hand me thet taller-pot from the chimbley-piece?"

"There you are, Hen. But do hurry. That's a good man."

"I won't be a minit a-greasin' these butes. Ef I don't do it, ye see, the water will be a-comin' in 'em like a Niagara. I bought these butes in Boston, o' Cobley, an' the old Tory swindled me most outrageously. Ef we ever march in tew Boston arter General Gage an' them Tories, I'm a-goin' fer Cobley fust thing, an' I'll either scare him tew death, or scare him intew givin' me another pair o' butes, thet's settled sartin!"

Tallow-pot in hand, Hen sat down on the doorstep to grease the rough cowhides which covered his unusually large pedal extremities. Dorothy knew there was no such thing as hurrying the hired man, so she allowed him to take his own time. In a few minutes the "butes" were greased to the Vermonter's satisfaction, and then Hen arose, and handed back the tallow-pot.

"Ef you'll hand me thet flint-lock behind the

pantry door, I'll see wot I can stir up ez game," he said, still on the door-step. His feet were slightly muddy, and he would not have stepped upon that scrupulously clean floor for the world.

"But, Hen, I want you to find Roger —"

"Yes, o' course, Miss Dorothy. I mean tew use the gun arfter I hev located him."

Musket on his shoulder, Hen Peabody left the tidy farm of eighty acres, and turned up the highway leading through Lexington to Concord. It was still misty, and the air was so raw it chilled the lean Vermonter to the core. To keep up his spirits he began to hum to himself an old-fashioned tune, running somewhat in this style :

Oh, I luv ter hear the cannons roar,
Boom-lacker, boom-lacker, boom, boom, boom!
They'll make our enemies feel right sore,
Boom-lacker, boom-lacker, boom, boom, boom!

"B'gosh, mebbe it won't be long afore we do hear the cannons roar ag'in," he muttered, reflectively. "Things is gittin' mighty techy like, tew say the least, with Captain Parker gittin' all hands tew jine his company, an' trainin' goin' on every day an' night. All ez wantin' ez fer General Gage tew set the ball tew rollin' at Boston, an' thar's no tellin' where things will stop."

Hen's step was slow, but it was likewise long,

and it did not take him long to reach Lexington green, called by some the Square. The green was a triangular plot of ground. Here the road from Boston forked, that to the right running to Bedford, and that to the left to Concord. Between the two was situated the meeting-house, facing in the direction from whence Hen had come. Just across the Bedford road from this edifice was Buckman's tavern, and here a crowd had assembled to listen to the latest news from Charlestown, Boston, and other places.

"Well, what's the news?" asked the Vermonter, as he stepped up to one of the men, Jonathan Harrington, who lived just north of the green.

"The assembly at Hartford has passed a resolution calling upon all of the people to arm themselves as fast as they can," was the answer.

"By gum! ye don't say! Thet looks juberous, don't it?"

"That's what it does," put in another man, Jonas Parker. "We're goin' to have war, no two ways on't."

"Parker says he'll never run from the red-coats," laughed Harrington.

"And I won't," burst out the man spoken of, vehemently. "They can't make me run, — I'll die first!" His declaration was a tragic one, as we shall soon see.

Inside of the tavern a dozen patriots of the free and easy class were singing the first verse of a "Liberty Song," to the tune of "Smile, Britannia :"

"Ye sons of Freedom, smile!
America unites;
And friends in Britain's isle
Will vindicate our rights;
In spite of Gage's hostile train
We will our liberties maintain."

The last line came out with a heavy swell, followed by a clanking of glasses and mugs, and a call for more flip. Several catching sight of Hen beckoned for him to come in, but he shook his head.

"I'm out a-huntin' fer Roger," he explained. "Hev any o' you seen him?"

No one had, and the Vermonter turned away. A few steps further on he came face to face with a youth named Paul Darly, the son of a farmer owning the land adjoining the Morse homestead. Paul was a clever lad, a few months younger than Roger, and the two were warm friends. Hen immediately asked him if he had seen his young master.

"Why, no, I haven't seen him since he went off yesterday," was the reply. "Maybe he is stuck on the road."

"We thought o' thet. Whar ye bound?"

"Nowhere. Father said I could come up to the green and learn the news. He thinks something is bound to happen soon."

"I calkerlate he ez right, Paul. Come along up the road with me, an' tell me the news. I hain't heered much, an' I can't wait, — leastwise I don't feel as if I oughter."

Paul was willing, and they set off without delay.

"We are all to drill regularly, and store away all the powder and ball we can lay hands on," said the youth. "And we've got to be very careful to put the ammunition where the redcoats can't find it."

"We've been a-doin' thet, Paul, ever since last fall. But you say we, Paul, — ez if you was old enough to jine the minute men!"

"We boys are forming a company of our own," returned Paul, rather proudly. "If we can't be minute men we'll be minute boys, and we'll fight just as hard as any of them, you see if we don't."

"Du tell!" Hen gave a good-natured snicker. "Who's gettin' this company up?"

"Roger and I, and Dick Winthrop, Andy Cresson, and half a dozen others. We've all got guns and can shoot pretty straight, and we are going into training immediately. If General Gage —"

Paul was interrupted in his explanation by a cry

from his companion. The mists had begun to rise, and Hen had beheld something which looked strangely familiar a long distance up the road.

"By gum!"

"What is it?" questioned Paul, eagerly. "Soldiers?"

"Soldiers? Naw! It's the ox-team an' the load o' corn fodder, all down in the ditch! Roger hez had a spill fer sartin!"

He set off on a run, with Paul beside him. Soon the ditch was reached, and there they found the oxen standing knee-deep in the water and mud, with the wreck of the wagon on their heels. To pass away the time, the animals were making a breakfast of the load they had been hauling.

"Gee haw, there!" yelled Hen. "Ye pesky critters, dumped Roger, did ye? Consarn ye, take thet!" And he banged each of the inoffensive animals in the sides with the stock of his gun. Not deserving this attack, one of the oxen turned on the Vermonter, and so sudden was the hoist he gave with his horns, that Hen was shot up into the air, to fall with a splash into the deepest part of the ditch.

"Wow!" came in a splutter, as he emerged, covered with weeds and mud. "Paul, Paul! hold him, or he'll horn you, tew, consarn him! Did ye ever see sech an ornery critter! I wonder whar Roger kin be!"

"Most likely he has gone off for help," suggested Paul. "I don't believe anything can be done before the wagon is unloaded. Let us throw the fodder up on the driest part of the road."

Taking care the oxen should not get another chance at him, Hen went to work, with Paul helping him. Soon the wagon was cleared, and then it was a comparatively easy matter to guide the team along the ditch to where there was a gradual rise to the highway. Then they backed up, and the corn fodder was once more put in place.

"It's mighty strange Roger doesn't show up," was Hen's comment, when the turnout was ready to proceed upon its way. "Mebbe he was hurt, an' crawled off tew some farmhouse fer help."

"The nearest place is Winthrop's," answered Paul, his face growing serious. "Shall I run over and see if he's there?"

"You take the team, an' I'll go over," said the Vermonter. "As it ez, I've got tew see Winthrop about some seed potatoes."

So it was arranged, and as Paul drove off slowly in one direction, the hired man started off in the other on foot. The finding of the team in the ditch disturbed him not a little, and his step was faster than ever before.

The Winthrop homestead stood some distance back from the roadway, surrounded by a beautiful

grove of trees. It was a tract of a hundred acres, and here lived Dick Winthrop, the boy Paul had previously mentioned. Besides Dick, there were Mr. Winthrop, a farmer well advanced in years, his wife, a daughter Nellie, and Dick's little brother Johnny, all of whom are destined to play more or less important parts in the chapters which follow.

A walk of five minutes brought Hen to the low stone wall, which surrounded the dooryard. As he was about to enter the gateway, he espied Dick Winthrop coming from the house on a run.

"Hen Peabody!" was the cry. "You are just the person I wanted to see. What in the world is up with Roger?"

"Thet's wot I want tew know, Dick. Is he here?"

"Here? No! The British soldiers have carried him off! I don't know but what they have shot him by this time!"

The Vermonter stared as if he had not heard aright.

"Dick Winthrop, have you gone daft!" he gasped.

"No. The Britishers have carried him off. Old Mammy Godell, who works for us, saw them do it. She was coming over from her house early this morning when she caught sight of Roger, with his hands bound, walking between

six redcoats, who were punching him with their bayonets. She was so scared she hid in the bushes, and she didn't come here until a few minutes ago. I was just starting out to spread the alarm."

CHAPTER V.

A BRUSH WITH THE ENEMY.

"By gum!"

This was a favourite expression of Hen's, and now it was delivered with unusual emphasis. The news he had just received nearly dumb-founded the hired man, and for several seconds he said no more.

"What do you think we ought to do?" questioned Dick, seeing he did not speak.

"Do? Find Roger, thet's wot! Thar's a mystery here fer sartin! Where did Mammy Godell meet the crowd?"

"Over near Stunker's woods. You can question her, if you want to. She's in the kitchen, shivering yet from her fright."

"I will. You keep right on, and tell the men down to Buckman's about this. It's likely you will meet Paul Darly with the ox-team on the road. Ef they kill Roger—" The Vermonter did not finish, but his thoughts travelled back to where that fond mother and sister awaited the boy's safe return home.

He entered the house, to find Mrs. Winthrop trying to get old Mammy Godell to talk. As Dick had stated, the poor creature, who was past sixty, had been frightened almost out of her wits, and felt certain the British soldiers would attack the house, and murder all of the inmates.

"They'll be a-comin' soon!" she whined. "Better bar the doors an' winders. Oh, that I should live to see such a day,—I who never missed a church meeting in fifty years!"

"Tell me something about the men ez had Roger," said Hen. "Which way were they goin'?"

"Up across the path to Uriah Bedwell's place," came in a trembling voice. "Six of 'em, all strong an' powerful, an' swearin' at the poor boy, an' punchin' him with their bayonets to make him go along! Oh, it was awful! He must be dead by this time, the wretches!" And Mammy Godell wrung her hands, and began to sob, a sob which was echoed from the sitting-room by Nellie Winthrop, who had been very friendly to Roger for years.

Not without considerable trouble, Hen managed to gain a little more definite information as to the exact locality where the meeting had occurred, and his accomplished, he left the Winthrop homestead by the back way, and plunged into the woods the

old woman had mentioned. He had barely started when he heard several gunshots, the same which had alarmed Sergeant Kegan and his soldiers. He halted to listen.

"Thet's Sam Dickerson out gunnin'," he muttered. "I could tell his old flint-lock a mile off. The fool! tew waste his powder when it won't be long afore we'll need every bit o' it ag'in the Britishers! I wonder ef he has seen anything o' the boy."

The last shot had sounded closer than the first, and he paused for a minute in the hope that the gunner would come up. But this did not happen, and again he proceeded on his way, along a narrow and hardly definable path, over rocks, dead leaves, and exposed tree roots. The mist was still thick under the trees, and the tangle of undergrowth cut off his vision on every side. In his haste, he stumbled and fell, and he had just picked himself up when a murmur of voices reached his ears.

The murmur came from the thicket to his left, and, after listening for a few seconds, he cautiously approached the spot, holding his flintlock ready for use, should occasion require. A slight *détour* had to be made, and this brought him up behind a large rock. With extreme caution he peered over the top of the rock.

The sight which met his gaze thrilled him to

the core. In a little clearing in the centre of the thicket stood six redcoats, and he felt sure they must be the men who had made Roger a prisoner.

"The shooting seems to have come to an end," came from one of the party. It was Sergeant Kegan.

"We can't be too careful, sergeant."

"I agree with you, Nelson."

"Well, are we to go back for the boy?" asked another of the soldiers, and Hen immediately pricked up his ears.

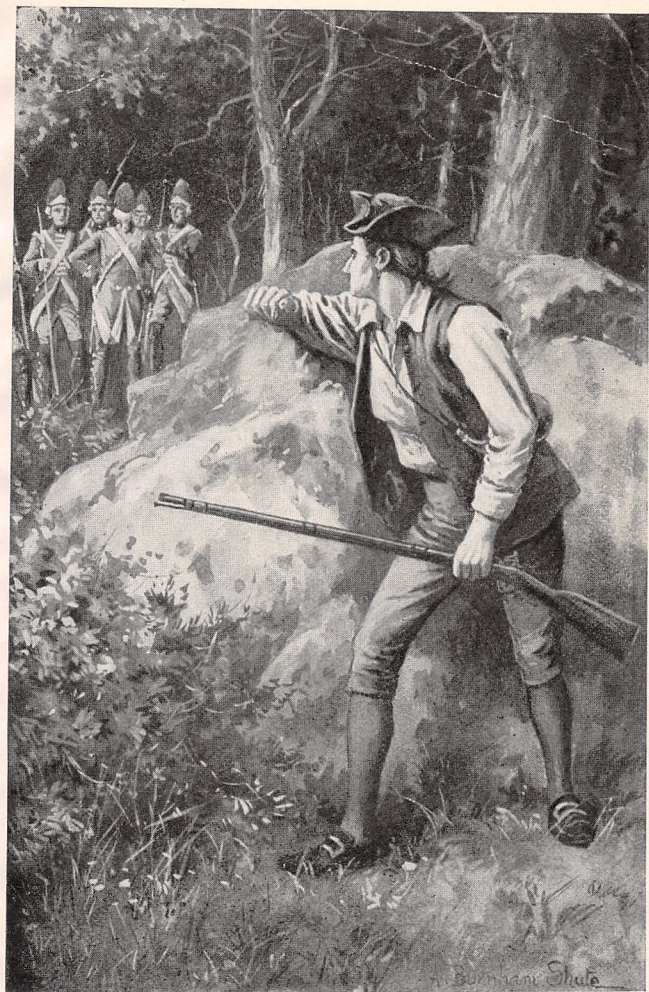
"I should like to," answered the sergeant. "I'll wager a tankard of ale he knows where most of the ammunition is stored around here."

"It would be a big feather in our caps if we could locate the stores before the others," went on another of the redcoats. "Let us go back and thrash the cub into submission."

At this Hen smiled grimly, and clutched his musket tighter than ever. Thrash Roger!

"Not ef I'm around!" he muttered. "Thank heaven, they hain't killed the lad! Fer a shillin' I would shoot the lot o' 'em!" And he took aim at Sergeant Kegan's head, as though to emphasise the thought.

"I would go back willingly, men, but I'm afraid we haven't time. The mist is rising rapidly, and we must not allow these rebels to discover our



"THE SIGHT WHICH MET HIS GAZE THRILLED HIM TO
THE CORE."

actions until Concord is reached. Perhaps we will be able to come back for the boy to-night."

"If he doesn't get away in the meantime," growled Nelson. "He seemed to be rather clever, and — What's that?"

Nelson stopped short. A noise in the direction of the rock had alarmed him. In lowering his musket Hen had allowed the butt to strike sharply upon the big stone.

In less than ten seconds the redcoats had sprung to the spot, each with his weapon ready for action. They felt that their presence in the neighbourhood was a perilous one, and the former gunshots had put them on the alert. As they came over the rock and around it, the Vermonter retreated, yet ere he could gain the shelter of the neighbouring trees he was discovered.

"Halt!" roared Sergeant Kegan, and his men levelled their guns; but before a shot could be fired Hen had disappeared from view. A second thought had convinced him that to meet the enemy at odds of six to one would be foolhardy in the extreme. He would be either killed or captured, and then all hope of saving Roger would come to an end.

"I'll remember ye!" he muttered, and continued to run, dodging behind first one shelter and then another. The redcoats pursued him only a short distance, then gave up the chase,

feeling they could not catch a man who was probably far better acquainted with the locality than themselves.

When, after another consultation, they resumed their journey in the direction of Concord, Hen was first for following them, to spread the alarm and frustrate their designs; but then he thought again of Roger, and his wrinkled brow grew perplexed.

"I must find the boy fust, — I promised Miss Dorothy I would do it," he said to himself. "Thar's no tellin' in wot kind o' difficulty they left the poor lad, drat 'em!"

As soon as the soldiers had moved off, therefore, he returned to the clearing by the rock. From here the moisture in the woods enabled the Vermonter to follow the back trail of the redcoats with ease. It led through a hollow and up a small hill, and two rods further on was the clearing in which was situated the old stone house previously mentioned. With extreme caution, for he was determined not to be again surprised, he crept up to the building and gazed into a kitchen window.

"They stopped here, thet's sartin," he murmured, as his ready eyes caught sight of the smouldering fire. "Don't seem tew be any o' 'em left behind."

As softly as a cat, he pushed open the oaken door and entered the desolate abode. From the

kitchen he proceeded to the other apartments on the ground floor. Everything was topsyturvy, for in their brief stay the British soldiers had used things to suit themselves.

"Nobuddy here," went on the hired man, as he peered around. "Whar kin Roger be?"

Raising his voice, he called out several times. No answer came back, and Hen scratched his head in perplexity.

"It's pesky queer—" he began, when a thump caused him to jump and clutch his gun. Several other thumps followed, and the Vermonter listened attentively.

"Sounds like spirit rappin's," he whispered. "But thar ain't nobuddy kin make me believe in spirits,—'ceptin' it be some good old Jamaica rum. Whar kin them thumps come from?"

Again he listened, more attentively than ever, and soon located the sounds. Going to the cellar door, he threw it open.

"Roger, air ye down thar? Ef ye air, why don't yer holler, seein' ez heow yer got ez good a pair o' lungs ez enny lad in Lexington deest-ric?"

A muffled cry was the answer received, a cry which to Hen sounded like the growl of a panther. Going to the fireplace, he secured a firebrand, swung it into a lively blaze, and flung it below, at the same time bringing his musket up for a shot.

A second later the gun dropped to the floor and the Vermonter was skipping down the steps two at a time.

"Roger, gagged and bound! No wonder ye couldn't open yer trap, my lad! O' course them air confounded Britishers did it?"

"Yes, Hen," was the boy's answer, as soon as he could speak.

"What on airth did they strip yer like this fer! Ye look—by gum! yer back ez covered with blood!"

"They tried to flog the secrets of the minute men out of me," and Roger gave a shiver, for rising caused him fresh pain in his back.

"The heathenish villains!" gasped Hen. "They oughter be strung up by the heels. "But I'll warrant they didn't git a word outer ye, did they now?"

"No, not one."

"Hurray fer you, Roger! Thet's the stuff these air United Colonies air made o', an' ef it comes tew fightin' we'll knock the puddin' outer them air redcoats in a jiffy. Here, put on yer shirt an' coat an' let's be goin'. Thar's work enough ahead tew do, with them rascals movin' along tew Concord."

CHAPTER VI.

URIAH BEDWELL, THE TORY.

"ARE they going to Concord?" cried the youth, as he began to don the garments taken from him.

"Yes. I met 'em in the woods, and they came nigh on capturin' me;" and returning to the kitchen, Hen told his story, and then asked Roger to give the particulars of his own, which were speedily forthcoming.

"I've spent an awful time down in that cellar," he concluded. "My back felt as if it were on fire, yet I was cold from head to foot. I had almost given up hope when I heard your footsteps. At first I thought it was those redcoats coming back. If you hadn't come to my rescue I don't know what I would have done," and he caught the hired man's arm affectionately.

Hen smiled broadly. "I told your sister I would hunt ye up, Roger. But come on; there ain't no time tew be wasted. Those redcoats must be watched. O' course, thar's only six o' 'em, but even six kin make a heap o' trouble ef they set out fer it. We'll tell everybody we

meet, an' ef they try any game on in Concord, they will git the liveliest reception they ever dreamed on, mark that!"

In a minute more Roger was ready. Putting his clothing over the raised-up streak on his back made the sore very painful, but he did not complain. The fact that the detachment of British soldiery intended to strike some sort of a blow in the neighbourhood filled him with alarm.

He did not know, nor was it discovered until long afterwards, that Sergeant Kegan was acting very largely upon his own responsibility. While in a half drunken state, a British officer in Boston had gotten several orders mixed up, and Kegan and his men had come out to the vicinity of Concord instead of marching to the northern outskirts of Charlestown, as intended. The sergeant was as illiterate and stupid as he was brutal, and his one notion was to do something which would cover himself and his men with glory, and he never stopped to consider that his actions might prove fatal to all of General Gage's designs. He was a perfect type of the soldier who is a dishonour and a hindrance to any military command.

By the time a road leading to Concord was reached, the sun had come out full and strong, drying up the mud with great rapidity. Soon they reached the grounds surrounding the home

of one of the physicians of the district. The doctor was preparing to go off on horseback to visit several patients, when Roger stopped him, and the boy and Hen told their story.

"Bless my soul, has it come so soon!" ejaculated the physician. "I knew it was brewing."

"You will help us, doctor?" asked Roger.

"Help you? Of course. Was I not at the Boston Tea Party? I am getting a little old now, but I will lay down my life, if wanted. Cuffy, bring me my brace of pistols and the horn of powder and ball. We'll give them as good as they send!"

Soon the servant appeared with the pistols, French weapons, with flint-locks almost as large as those used on the guns of that time. Strapping the pistols to his waist, and slinging his horn of powder and ball over his shoulder, Doctor Hardwaith rode away with Roger and Hen trudging by his side.

Half a dozen other stops were made, and by the time the outskirts of Concord were reached, a score of minute men and farmers had joined the party. The news that a detachment of British soldiery was visiting the vicinity in secret spread like wild-fire, and soon the roll of a drum was heard calling the militia of Concord to arms.

"I saw the soldiers!" cried an old farmer, coming up to the gathering, armed with nothing

but the blade of his scythe. "They are skulking in the meadow back of Randolph's place!"

"After 'em! After 'em!" came the cry. "We'll teach 'em a lesson fer tryin' to do their dirty work in secret! Come on, ye minute men! Come on!"

Loud and clear came the rallying cry, and a rush was made for the meadow in question, the old farmer with the scythe and the doctor leading the way, with Roger, Hen, and two score of others at their heels. Many of the men were armed with nothing but sticks and stones, but their hearts beat boldly, and they were willing to give up their lives then and there in the cause of liberty.

Long before they arrived, Sergeant Kegan and his detachment had taken the alarm, and were in full retreat, satisfied that to attempt to withstand an attack from such superior numbers would be foolhardy. The redcoats rushed across the meadow, and, fording a small brook, took to the road leading to Winchester.

"Back, or we'll fire!" cried Sergeant Kegan, as the crowd of pursuers came within hailing distance. "Back, I say!"

"Stand, and give yourselves up!" came in the loud, clear voice of Doctor Hardwaith. "If you have done nothing wrong you will not be harmed."

For reply the redcoats opened fire. The six reports from five muskets and Sergeant Kegan's

pistol had scarcely rent the air when Doctor Hardwaith and the old farmer with the scythe were seen to throw up their hands and fall to the ground.

The fire was returned instantly by Hen and three other men, and two of the redcoats were heard to shriek out with pain, although they still kept on running with their companions. The fall of the doctor and the farmer had brought the colonists to a halt, and they gathered around to ascertain what damage had been done.

It was found that the doctor had been struck in the left shoulder, and the farmer in the right leg. Neither wound was serious, and both sufferers were taken to the nearest farmhouse and cared for. All this of course took time, and when the minute men and their friends were ready to go on again, they found that Sergeant Kegan's detachment had left the road, and taken to the woods.

"They'll git away, ez sure ez fate!" muttered Hen. "The pesky rascals!"

"They'll not return to Boston in a hurry," said Roger. "If they get back at all it will be by sneaking journeys made in the dark. Let us follow before they have a chance to hide."

Feeling it would be useless to go on without their weapons, those who were unarmed turned back, leaving but nine men to follow Roger's

advice. The woods the British soldiers had entered were very heavy, and but slow progress could be made through them. The trail, however, was plain, and this counted for a good deal.

Presently the party reached a large clearing, situated on a side road leading to Winchester. Here was erected one of the finest houses in the district, belonging to Uriah Bedwell, a lawyer who did business in Boston and Hartford.

It was known that Uriah Bedwell was a Tory, that is, that he sided with England in the quarrel which was growing so rapidly. It was also known that the lawyer had attempted to aid the British authorities in enforcing the obnoxious Stamp Act some time previous, and this caused many of the colonists to put the lawyer's entire household down as traitors and enemies.

"Looks tew me ez ef the trail ended here," observed Hen, as the party came to a halt in front of the mansion.

Mounting the front porch, he grasped the heavy iron knocker, and used it vigorously. In a moment the door was flung open, and Uriah Bedwell appeared.

"Hullo, what's the meaning of this?" he demanded, harshly.

"It means we air on the trail o' six British red-coats thet jes' come this way, Mister Bedwell," replied Hen, coolly. "I reckon you seen 'em."

"I've seen nothing of any soldiers," was the steady reply.

"You haven't?" cried Roger, and several others.

"No. Do you doubt my word?" And Uriah Bedwell, thin, flat-chested, and with the beaked nose of a London Jew, drew himself up majestically, as if to doubt his word would be the most unpardonable sin in the world.

"I must say ez I do doubt it," drawled Hen. "They came this way, and —"

"You good-for-nothing rascal!" gasped Uriah Bedwell. "To doubt my word! I've a good mind to knock you down where you stand!"

"It's your privilege tew try, Mister Bedwell. But ef ye find out it's a stone wall ez has been tackled, why, don't blame me. Say, boys, do we go in an' search the house?"

"Yes, yes," answered several, but the others hesitated.

"If the soldiers are not hidden here, Mr. Bedwell will certainly not object to our taking a look around," put in Roger.

The lawyer turned upon the youth with a heavy frown.

"You think yourself smart and crafty, don't you?" he snarled. "I suppose if I don't let you go through, you'll go through anyway."

"Thet's about the size o' it, Mister Bedwell," said Hen.

"Well, you can search the house to your heart's content. But I'll tell you beforehand you'll find nothing, and sooner or later all of you shall pay dearly for this insult," and thus speaking, the lawyer stepped back and allowed the party to enter.

"The durn Tory!" muttered Hen. "He can't fool me. If them air chaps ain't here, he hez provided 'em with horses tew git away on. He's ez slick ez a greased hog, thet man!"

The search through the mansion did not take long. Every room was visited, also the garret and cellar, but without finding any trace of the soldiers. Besides the lawyer, there were his wife and two girls present, and all looked on coldly as the searchers moved from place to place.

"You rebels are really goin' crazy, I believe!" snapped Mrs. Bedwell. "Now don't you tech any of them pies!" she cried, as Roger entered the kitchen pantry. "If you do I'll come after you with the broom."

"Thank you, my sister Dorothy can bake all the pies I care to eat," answered Roger, somewhat amused by the lady's excited manner.

"An' better pies than any turned out here," put in Hen. "Why, Miss Dorothy Morse's pumpkin pie ez a dream, — sumthin' good enough fer even the angel Gabriel to eat."

"Don't talk to me, you — you ignorant plough-

hand!" cried Mrs. Bedwell. "If you ever get anything half as good to eat as those pies, you can be thankful."

"Don't talk to them, maw," interrupted one of the girls.

"I won't, Clarissa. But they sha'n't insult me in my own house. Dorothy Morse indeed! As if that white-faced slip of a girl could bake alongside of you and Roxana and myself!" And the lady of the house flounced out of the kitchen in high anger.

"Nobody in this pantry," said Roger, after looking behind the door and into an upturned empty barrel. "Perhaps —"

He broke off short, as a bright object on the floor caught his eye. He picked it up and a quick look of recognition crossed his face. It was a button such as had adorned the front of Sergeant Kegan's military coat.

CHAPTER VII.

ROGER ON THE WATCH.

"WHAT hev ye found?" asked Hen, as Roger held the object up.

"A button, such as those redcoats wear."

"By gum, we're on the scent then! Let us take another look around."

The others were informed of Roger's find, and again the house was searched. When told about the button, Uriah Bedwell laughed harshly.

"We had an old army coat lying around for years," he said. "Probably the button is from that."

"Probably," muttered Hen, under his breath, "and then, ag'in, probably not, b'gosh."

Two of the party had gone down to the barn and other outbuildings, and now they came back with the report that all of the horses were in their stalls and everything looked undisturbed.

"This looks like they had been here and gone," said a farmer of the party. "No use to waste more time here. Let us get out and scatter around. We are certain to strike their trail again, sooner or later."

Roger and Hen were doubtful, but at length they marched from the mansion with the others. As soon as they were over the door-sill, Uriah Bedwell banged the door in their faces and locked it.

It was decided by the men to break up into three parties, and, this settled, all left the clearing. But they had not gone far before Roger beckoned Hen to fall to the rear.

"Uriah Bedwell and his family can't make me believe that those soldiers are not stopping at his place," he whispered. "I saw a look pass between him and his wife that I'm going to solve before I leave."

"Du you mean tew say you air goin' back, Roger? Why, the old chap ez mad enough at ye to chew ye up!"

"I'm not going to let him see me, Hen. Did you notice that big elm-tree in the dooryard?"

"O' course; one o' the biggest and finest elms in these parts, an' altogether tew good fer sech an all-fired mean man ez Uriah Bedwell tew possess."

"From that tree one can look right into the windows of his library, and into the rooms on the upper floor, and I'm going to climb up it and watch."

"Want me tew go along?"

"No, I want you to go to some neighbour and send word home that I am safe and sound. Mother is sick, as you know, and it may make

her feel worse if she thinks I am in trouble. You needn't say much about the way I was abused, for it won't do any good. You can come back later, if you will, and remember the hoot of an owl, twice repeated, will be the signal between us."

With this understanding they separated, and a few seconds later Roger was on his return to the spot he had left but a short while before.

Young as he was, the youth realised that he was on a delicate and dangerous mission. His companions were gone, and whatever was to come must be met by himself single-handed.

With extreme caution he crept up to the edge of the clearing and took a survey of the situation. To his left was the mansion, and to his right the barn and other outbuildings. A number of chickens were roaming around the barnyard, but otherwise there were no signs of life about the place.

"They intend to keep indoors, for awhile at least," he thought. "Now how can I reach that tree without exposing myself?"

Glancing over the clearing, he saw a small ditch running from behind the barn to a bit of meadow land bordering the woods on the opposite side. At one point the ditch was crossed by a row of currant and elderberry bushes, and these bushes extended almost to the foot of the elm previously mentioned.

Making a half circuit of the clearing, he threw himself down on his hands and knees in the ditch, which, fortunately, was almost dry, and crawled along until the row of bushes was gained. Here he branched off, and, by skulking along the new cover, reached the elm without any one being the wiser. A low branch of the stately tree hung almost within reach, and, leaping for it, he was soon fifteen feet from the ground and just where he wanted to be.

Of course, as it was early spring, the elm was without leaves, and Roger was particular to keep the main trunk of his shelter between himself and the mansion, as he selected a place where to sit down and watch.

He was on a level with the windows of the second story, and, as the house had no blinds, it was easy for him to look into the front and a side bedroom.

Ten minutes passed, — a period of time which to Roger just then seemed unusually long, — when a movement in the front bedroom attracted his attention. A large walnut wardrobe standing in one corner was moving away from the wall. It moved forward a foot and a half, and then from behind it stepped the form of Sergeant Kegan.

“Hullo! that’s queer!” the boy murmured. “I looked into that wardrobe myself. I’ll wager

there is some opening in that wall leading to a secret room of which we never dreamed."

The form of the soldier Nelson followed that of the sergeant, and soon the bedroom held all of the redcoats Roger had encountered on the road. The clothing of the party was covered with dust and cobwebs, showing they had been in some place but little used.

Leaving the bedroom, the soldiers filed downstairs out of Roger's sight. He looked for them in the library, but they did not appear, nor did any of them venture outside.

"If only I could call back the men!" thought Roger. "I wonder how long it will be before Hen gets back."

Having made sure that the soldiers were in the mansion, he thought it no use to remain in the elm longer, and so dropped to the ground back of the elderberry bushes. He had just reached the ditch and was crawling towards the woods, when Clarissa Bedwell came out of the kitchen door and started for the barn.

"Oh, my!" she shrieked, as she caught sight of something moving in the grass. "What's that? Roger Morse, I declare! Paw! Paw! Come out here, quick! Here is that young rebel come back!"

Her cries attracted immediate attention, and out rushed Uriah Bedwell, armed with a musket,

and followed by his wife and his other daughter. At first Roger was for running, but suddenly he changed his mind.

"You villain, what are you up to now?" demanded the lawyer, as he came up with a face full of both fear and rage. "Spying around, eh?"

"Yes, I was," answered Roger, boldly.

"A nice business for you to be in, I must say."

To this the youth did not answer.

"I suppose you think even yet those soldiers must be here?"

"I know they came up this way."

"You scamp!" Uriah Bedwell dropped his musket and caught the lad by the throat. "I've a good mind to choke the worthless life out of you!"

"Let go of me!"

"I will not. You come down to the barn with me, and we'll have it out with a rawhide. I'll teach you to insult a man in his own home."

"That's right, paw!" put in Clarissa.

"He's the sassiest boy in Lexington," added Roxana.

"Insulted me about our pies, too," was Mrs. Bedwell's comment. "Lay it on to him good, Uriah!"

"Never fear but I will," added the head of the house. "I'll show him that — Hang me, if he hasn't got away!"

For, with a dexterous twist, Roger had broken the hold on his throat, and now he was running across the barn-yard at top speed.

"Stop! stop, or I'll fire on you!" roared Uriah Bedwell, as he picked up his musket. But, before he could take aim, even if he really intended to shoot, Roger was out of range behind the trees. The youth did not stop running until he was well into the woods, and beyond pursuit.

"Gosh! but I'm having hot times, even if there isn't any war," was his comment as, utterly exhausted, he dropped on a mossy bank to rest. "I wish I had my gun with me. What a pity I didn't take Hen's. He could easily have gotten another somewhere else."

While resting, Roger tried to figure out what was best to do next. He reached the conclusion that there was nothing but to wait for the hired man to return, when those on the hunt could be notified where the soldiers were.

"And I'll show Uriah Bedwell up for the lying Tory that he is," he concluded, as he rubbed his throat, which the lawyer had squeezed a good deal harder than was necessary.

A quarter of an hour went by, and Roger was just arising to his feet, when a crackling of twigs back of him caught his ears. He turned around, to behold a pair of gleaming eyes fastened upon him. The eyes belonged to a hungry-looking

wolf, and, an instant after, the beast made a leap for the youth!

Taken almost completely by surprise, Roger had still presence of mind enough to leap to one side, and the wolf dashed past him and down the mossy bank into a hollow between several rocks.

There was a savage snarl as the beast struck the rocks and rolled over. But he was up on his feet quicker than it takes to relate it, and again he dashed towards Roger, just as the boy picked up a rock with which to defend himself. Had he had the musket, the fate of the beast would have been sealed then and there.

The rock struck the wolf squarely in the neck, and over he went again, barking not unlike a dog gone mad. No other stone was handy, and, as the beast came on a third time, Roger looked about in vain for something else with which to defend himself.

At that instant he thought of the elm-tree he had climbed. A similar tree was now beside him, and as the wolf leaped, so did the boy. His hands grasped a heavy limb, and he drew himself up, with the wolf clinging to the heel of one of his boots. A frantic swing and a kick, and the wolf fell to the ground, and Roger was, for the time being at least, safe.

Finding his expected victim beyond his reach, the wolf began clawing and snarling at the foot of

the tree. He was an extra large animal, and Roger shuddered when he thought of the fate he had escaped.

“He would kill me in no time if he got at me,” he thought. “The thing of it is, now I am up here, how long will the brute keep me here?”

CHAPTER VIII.

THE STRANGE MEETING AT URIA BEDWELL'S HOUSE.

To be treed by a wolf is a situation by no means pleasant, yet Roger had occasionally hunted these wild beasts, which prowled in the woods around Lexington and Concord at this early date, and he was, therefore, not as much horrified as might otherwise have been the case.

"If I only had some kind of a weapon, I'd give it to you hot!" he murmured, as he gazed down at the snapping and barking animal. "I think about one shot through that right eye of yours would send you to grass instant!"

The barking of the wolf had attracted a mate to the vicinity, and soon both beasts were crouching at the foot of the tree trunk, waiting for Roger to descend.

"I'm not coming down just yet, my boys!" said the lad. "But I'll see if I can't show you a trick you've not seen before."

Moving towards the top of the tree, he selected a stout branch, and cut off about five feet of its

length. At either end he made a deep notch, and then, drawing a piece of fishing-line from his pocket, he proceeded to bend the branch into a rough but sturdy bow.

His next movement was to select several arrows. These he made very long, with sharp points, and tipped them with feathers taken from a bird's nest close at hand. He had made bows and arrows galore since he had learned how to handle a knife, and the task of finishing the entire outfit did not occupy an hour.

In the meantime, the wolves kept their station at the foot of the tree, barking occasionally, and never taking their hungry eyes from their expected victim. They seemed to think that sooner or later he must come down to them.

"I won't come down, but I'll send my substitute," said Roger, "and you can see how digestible he is!" and he placed one of the arrows in the bow, took long and careful aim at the larger of the wolves, and let fly.

The whirr of string and arrow was followed by a barking roar of pain, and the wolf tumbled on his back, the arrow having entered his eye, and passed downward into his mouth. He turned and tumbled for a moment, then staggered off into the brush and was lost to sight.

"That settles number one," thought Roger. "Now for number two."

The second wolf had skulked away when his mate was wounded, but presently he came back, just as the lad expected he would. He snarled more fiercely than ever as he sniffed at the bloody spot where his mate had stood.

Again an arrow was fitted into the bow, and again Roger took careful aim. But the second wolf was wary, and, just as the boy let fly, he skipped to one side, and the arrow merely grazed his ear, causing him to give a yelp of pain.

"Missed!" cried the youth, in deep disappointment. "Well, I have one more arrow left, so here goes."

Getting an aim was now no easy work, for the wolf was sly, and every time he saw the arrow being pointed towards him, he shifted his position, until Roger had followed him around the tree twice.

"I'll get down a little closer," thought the youth, and started to lower himself to another branch, when there came a crack and a creak, and down he went to the earth, carrying his bow and arrow in one hand, and the broken tree limb in the other.

Luckily he landed on his feet, otherwise he might have been seriously injured. The wolf had retreated, not knowing what to make of the proceedings; but now, as he saw Roger within his reach at last, he gave a yelp of triumph

and rushed in, intending to leap for the boy's throat.

But Roger still had his wits about him. As the beast came on, the arrow was adjusted, and a hasty aim taken. The wooden shaft caught the wolf in the foreleg, and he went down with a snarl, only to come up like a flash for another attack.

There was now nothing left to do but to run, and the youth was on the point of taking to his heels, when a musket-shot rang out, and a bullet, whizzing within a foot of Roger's ear, took the wolf in the neck, and finished his earthly career.

"By gum! Roger, don't ye know better nor tew cum down in these woods an' stir up wolves?" exclaimed the welcome voice of Hen. "Ef I hadn't a-cum in the nick o' time, whar would ye be? Down in the maw o' thet beast!"

"That is so, Hen, and I thank you for saving my life," returned Roger, warmly. "It was a narrow escape," he added, with a shudder.

"Huntin' 'em with a bow-arrow, tew! Gosh! but this is queer. Thought you wuz goin' back to Bedwell's house?"

"I did go back," and Roger gave an account of all that had occurred since the hired man had left him. "I fancy that other wolf isn't far off," he concluded.

"Yes, I met him over by the brook, breathin'

his last. But, gee-shoo! then them redcoats air over tew Bedwell's arfter all! Bedwell will be hung fer this, ef them Britishers mean harm tew the Sons o' Liberty about Lexington an' Concord."

"The question is, what is best to do now?" returned Roger. "It must be about three o'clock in the afternoon, isn't it?"

"It's nearer four, Roger. An' here ez sumthin' tew eat, seein' ez how yer ain't had a mouthful since early mornin'. Andy Cresson sent it for ye, an' he's goin' tew your house tew tell the folks everything ez right."

"Good for Andy. He's one of our minute boys, you know."

"So Dick Winthrop was a-sayin'. Roger, ye take arfter yer father, allers ready tew fight when thar's a call tew arms. Gosh! but how yer father fit them Frenchers in the last war! But eat thet lunch up, an' then we'll be on our way. I reckon 'twill be best tew rouse the neighbourhood an' surround Bedwell's mansion, eh?"

"Perhaps so, and yet—" Roger hesitated, took a bite of some bread and cold meat Andy had sent him, and went on. "I've got another plan we might carry out, Hen."

"Ye-as."

"Yes. I feel certain that detachment of soldiery is up here for some special purpose,—the sergeant admitted as much,—and I'm in for

watching the mansion until the soldiers leave and then following them."

"Thet's a bright idee, swizzle me ef it ain't. Let us both watch. They air bound tew make a move o' sum sort afore night."

"So I think," concluded Roger.

Hurrying through the woods, they soon reached the edge of the clearing again, and here they sat down to watch, while Roger finished the lunch, washing it down with some water from a nearby spring. His back still felt sore and stiff, but the sharp pain was gone, and in the excitement of the moment the injuries which had been received were forgotten.

The spring day was drawing to a close when Hen held up his hand and pointed to a road on the opposite side of the clearing. A horseman was coming up to the mansion at full speed. He was attired in a long travelling cloak, and his large-brimmed hat was drawn down well over his eyes.

"Who is it?" whispered Roger.

"He's a stranger in these parts," replied Hen. "I know every man fer ten miles around, an' I never clapped eyes on him afore."

"He's in a great hurry," went on the youth, as the horseman dashed up to the porch of the mansion, dismounted, and used the knocker. He gave three double knocks in rapid succession, and the door flew open instantly.

"He's been expected, too," went on Roger. "I'll wager he carries some important message."

"By gum! I reckon you air right. Ef I know anything about it, things air gittin' mighty mysterious like, around this deestricht. I wonder ef General Gage down in Boston is plannin' sum sort o' an attack? Ef he is, it will be great hustlin' fer the minute men, mark me!"

"And for the minute boys, too," added Roger. "Hen, it's getting darker. I wonder if I can't creep up to the house and find out what is going on!"

"Ye might," answered the Vermonter, reflectively. "But it's runnin' big risks, seein' as how Uriah Bedwell threatened tew shoot ye."

"I'm going to risk it, anyway. You stay here, and hold your gun ready for use."

"Jest ez you say, Roger. But be keerful, lad. I wouldn't have ye hurt fer the world. Wot would yer maw an' Miss Dorothy do?"

Roger did not answer to this, although he heard the words and resolved to heed them. Leaving Hen, he made a *détour*, and came up in the rear of the mansion. It was now growing dark rapidly, and, making a swift and noiseless dash, he gained the shelter of the kitchen shed without being observed by any one but Hen, who stared at him with mouth wide open with amazement, and finger on the trigger of his musket, ready to

fire at the first person who appeared to attack his young master.

"The image o' his daddy," he soliloquised. "Ef we hed more sech blood around, these colonies would have been free long ago!"

Having gained the shelter of the kitchen shed, Roger's next movement was still more daring. Making sure no one was present in the kitchen itself, he slipped into the apartment, the door, for some unknown reason, being unlatched.

A dim tallow candle burned upon the heavy oaken table, casting grotesque shadows over the floors and walls. The next room was the dining apartment, and this was utterly dark, but from the library came a stream of light under the door.

Should he venture that far? Roger waited, every nerve on a tension. What would they do with him if he were caught?

"They would hang me for a spy, I suppose," he thought. "But I won't stop now. Who knows but what they are plotting something awful against the town folks? Captain Parker said they were equal to it."

As noiselessly as a cat Roger tiptoed his way across the sanded floor of the dining-hall until the library door was gained. Hardly had he reached the position than he heard the voice of Sergeant Kegan:

"I understand the order, Captain Rembrandt,

and you can rest assured that I will do all in my power to capture this Samuel Adams and his friend John Hancock, and place them under military arrest in the name of the King."

"And you must lose no delay, Sergeant Kegan," came in the voice of a stranger, presumably he who had just arrived on horseback. "Remember, these two men are now at the head of the new provisional government of Massachusetts, and if they are captured and sent back to England the backbone of this traitorous uprising will be broken."

"I understand, sir, the importance of the mission, and as our friend here, Mr. Bedwell, knows where Adams and Hancock are stopping to-night, I do not see how we can fail," came from the sergeant. "But of the reinforcements —"

"General Gage will attend to that. Inside of another twenty-four hours this district will be surprised, as it was never surprised before. Our worthy general is determined that the rebels shall be crushed, even if it takes all of the troops in Boston to do it," was the reply from Captain Rembrandt.

CHAPTER IX.

PAUL REVERE AND ROGER SPREAD THE ALARM.

ROGER'S heart almost stopped beating, as the conversation recorded above fell upon his ears. What was this the British officers were saying? They were going to capture Samuel Adams and John Hancock, and place them under military arrest! The two greatest men, politically, the colonies at that time knew! It must never be!

Young as he was, he realised the importance of such a capture, should it be executed. In all the movements of the patriots in and about Boston, Samuel Adams was, to use the expression framed at that time, "the power behind the throne." He was a foremost member of Congress in 1774, and he helped draw up the original draft of the State Constitution, and now hardly a movement was made but what he was directly or indirectly concerned in it.

Of John Hancock no less could be said. Elected to the presidency of the Provincial Congress in 1774, he stood shoulder to shoulder with Sam-

uel Adams, in company with Doctor Warren, afterwards General Warren, the martyr-hero of Bunker Hill, Josiah Quincy, Jr., the patriots' Cicero, William Cooper, the fearless Boston town clerk, and a score of men equally feared by the Crown. In addition to being an active patriot, Hancock was one of the wealthiest landowners and business men of Boston, and his influence caused many a merchant to become a Whig, who might otherwise have turned Tory.

"It must not be," thought the boy. "I must tell Captain Parker, — everybody. Somebody must know where Mr. Adams and Mr. Hancock are stopping to-night, and warn them to seek a place of safety. And the militia and minute men must be on guard, too, against the troops General Gage is going to send from Boston. That surprise must not be all on one side!"

With bated breath he was on the point of slipping back into the kitchen, when he felt a cold, bony hand on his collar. Wheeling about, he found himself face to face with a soldier.

"My eyes! you young villain! I'll teach you how to spy on us!" cried the Britisher, in commingled alarm and rage.

"Hands off!" returned Roger, desperately, and threw the fellow off. "Let me pass, or I'll — I'll run you through with this dagger!"

As we know, he had no such weapon, but, in the semi-darkness, the threat had the desired effect, for the redcoat fell back in terror, imagining he already felt the cold steel piercing his vitals.

The instant the soldier got out of his way, Roger darted for the kitchen. As he passed around the dining-room table, his hand struck the stock of a musket the soldier had placed there while he went into the cellar for a glass of liquor. Seizing the weapon, he continued on his way through the kitchen, and out into the darkness of the night.

By this time the house was in an uproar, and those who had been in the library came forth, and demanded to know the cause of the noise.

"That boy, — he was here, and he has gone, with my gun!" gasped the redcoat. He had been to the cellar for liquor several times, and the drink and sudden turn of affairs partly dazed him.

"What boy?" demanded the officer Sergeant Kegan had addressed as Captain Rembrandt.

"The lad we caught this morning," replied the soldier.

"Roger Morse!" ejaculated Uriah Bedwell. "You are sure of this?"

"Am I sure? Indeed I am! He tried to stab me with a dagger. That is how he got my



“‘YOU YOUNG VILLAIN! I’LL TEACH YOU HOW TO SPY
ON US!’”

gun," went on the redcoat, determined to put the best possible light upon his own actions. "Why, he stabbed at me three times, and cut my coat-slee —"

"After him, if he is a spy," cried Captain Rembrandt, cutting the soldier short. "If he heard what we were talking about, and spreads the news, there will be the Old Nick to pay!"

"I will be ruined — utterly ruined!" shrieked Uriah Bedwell. "The rebels will burn the house over my head."

"And they'll give us no chance to get back to Boston," put in Sergeant Kegan. "I wish I hadn't bothered with him when we met on the road."

By this time all the men were outside, deeming further attempts at secrecy useless. A rush was made to the stable, to secure the horses, while four of the soldiers scattered to ascertain, if possible, what had become of Roger.

In the meantime the boy was making for the woods as fast as the darkness and the weight of the heavy musket would permit. Twice he stumbled and fell, but he quickly picked himself up again and went on, until at last he gained the spot where he had left Hen.

To his consternation the Vermonter was gone.

"Hen! Hen Peabody!" he called out, as loudly as he dared, a dozen times, but no answer came back; and then he gave the owl-hoot signal.

"Here's a pickle," he muttered. "What's to do now? I can't wait here for him, and if I go on and he comes back he won't know what to make of it. Hen, where are you?"

Again the cry was a useless one, and Roger was standing perfectly still, wondering what his next movement should be, when he was suddenly seized from behind by a powerful pair of arms which nearly crushed his arms into his ribs.

"Hi, let up! Who are you?" he began, when a bag was thrown over his head and let down over his shoulders. The bag had once contained flour, and what was left of this nearly blinded and choked him. Before he could resist, a rope was passed around his shoulders, arms, and legs, and he found himself a close prisoner.

Not a word had been spoken up to this time by his mysterious assailants, and now the men, or whoever they were, spoke in such low tones it was impossible for him to catch what was said, or to make a guess at who they were. Yet he felt reasonably certain they were not the men from the mansion he had just quitted.

With his feet bound, he could not move. The musket had dropped to the ground. Now he was raised up on a man's shoulder, while one or two others picked up the weapon. The party struck off through the woods, and Roger knew

this, for very often a branch or a bush scratched him as they progressed.

Quarter of an hour later the youth was thrown violently to the ground. He landed on a hard, smooth surface, and felt he must be in a vacant outbuilding of some kind, probably a barn. The ropes which bound him were examined, and then a quantity of hay was thrown over him. Soon after this he was left alone.

Where was he and who were the men who had brought him to the spot? These were questions easy to ask, but just then impossible to answer. He did not meditate on the subject long. His one idea was to get free and spread the alarm among the minute men and his friends.

But though his will was strong, his strength was limited. He tugged, hauled, turned, and twisted until his wrists ached and bled, and still the rope which held his hands refused to stretch or part.

But though he could not sever his bonds, he managed to kick the hay from his body and rise to his feet. This accomplished, he moved forward inch by inch until he came up to the side of the building into which he had been cast a prisoner. By moving his head around cautiously, he at length managed to get the flour bag fastened on a protruding nail, and a vigorous pull first tore the covering and then hauled it completely away.

Drawing a long and sweet breath after such close confinement, Roger gazed around him as well as the darkness of the night would permit. As he had surmised, the building was a vacant barn, belonging to the estate of a man who had gone to England with his family over a year before. For some reason, both the barn and the man's house were popularly supposed to be haunted, and hence the majority of the folks living in the neighbourhood gave the place a wide berth.

Reaching the doorway of the barn, the youth managed, although not without great difficulty, to hop outside and over to the vicinity of a road leading to Boston. The night was calm and clear, and all around was quiet, saving for the cries of the night-birds in the woods. Presently, however, from a long distance off, he detected the swift hoof-strokes of a horse.

"Somebody is in a hurry," he thought, as the sounds came closer. "I wonder if it is friend or foe!"

He hopped closer to the roadway, yet kept his body concealed behind a handy clump of brush. An anxious half-minute passed, and then there appeared from out of the darkness a form Roger had seen many times before, dashing along on a steed that was white with foam.

"Paul Revere!" yelled the boy, joyfully.
"Paul Revere!"

"Who calls?" demanded the horseman, momentarily checking his steed.

"It is I, Roger Morse! Help me; I am bound hands and feet."

"A prisoner! Is it possible!" The horseman came closer. "Who did this?" he went on, and Roger saw that the man whose name was to be lauded in song and verse for many years to come was breathless with hard riding. He knew Paul Revere quite well, for Revere was a goldsmith and engraver, and had been connected in a business way with the establishment founded in Boston by Mrs. Morse's father, the plate-ware dealer.

"I do not know who bound me," answered the youth. "I was taken unawares. I believe, though, it was the work of some British soldiers, or Tories of this vicinity. I have learned that they intend to arrest Samuel Adams and John Hancock; and General Gage is —"

"General Gage has already sent a body of troops from Boston up to Phipps's farm," finished Paul Revere, as he severed Roger's bonds with a knife. "They are on their way hither to destroy all the military stores to be found in Lexington and Concord. Doctor Warren sent me and William Dawes out to give the alarm. I don't know where Dawes is. I took horse from Charlestown, and at the Neck half a dozen British officers attacked me, but I knocked one of them over into a

clay-pit and got away by the skin of my teeth. I just stopped at Medford and aroused the minute men there, and now I must be off. Take care of yourself, lad."

"I will, — but stop, — what of Mr. Adams and Mr. Hancock?"

"They are up to Minister Clark's house, in Lexington. They have a guard of eight men with them, but I'll give them warning for all of that. Good-night, and be on your guard!"

And, ere he had stopped speaking, Paul Revere was on his way once more, urging his faithful horse forward at a breakneck speed. Who is there among our American boys who has not heard of this daring ride of Paul Revere, in the cause of liberty?

As the messenger flashed out of sight in the darkness, Roger hurried off after him. Lexington was over a mile away, and his home was just this side of the village, but off a short distance to the southward. Should he go home first, or spend the precious moments in arousing his neighbours?

What he had heard, along with what he had already known, filled him with alarm. It was certain then that General Gage had made a move at last! The fight for liberty was about to begin!

"It's liberty or death!" he thought, with his youthful face set as firmly as that of the old-time soldier, who knows not the meaning of surrender.

"Our patriots will never give in, no matter what the British and Tories try to force them to do. I must rouse up every man I can, — and call the minute boys together, too!"

Away he went up the road at top speed. He was just passing the nearest of the farmhouses fronting on the highway, when a sudden command from the gloom startled him.

"Halt! Who goes there?"

"It is I, Mr. Framly, — Roger Morse."

"Oh, Roger! I heard you had been captured by the redcoats."

"I was," answered the boy, as he drew closer to the farmer, whose voice he had recognised.

"How is it you are out?"

"My daughter is sick, and I was going over to the doctor's for some medicine. Paul Revere just told me —"

"Yes, I know, for I met him, too. Everybody must be aroused," said the youth, quickly.

"You are right, but I must get the medicine first," and Framly turned away, leaving Roger to go on alone.

A house could be seen in the distance, that in which lived Andy Cresson, the chum who had sent him the lunch that afternoon. All was pitch-dark about the place, for it was but an hour after midnight. Rushing up to the front door, Roger used the iron knocker vigorously. A few seconds

of silence followed, then an upper window was raised.

"Who is there?" came in the voice of Ira Cresson, Andy's father.

"Rouse up, Mr. Cresson, and call Andy!" replied Roger. "General Gage is sending troops to take our military stores away, and to arrest Samuel Adams and John Hancock."

"What!" came in almost a shriek. "Are ye certain, Roger?"

"Yes, sir. Come, hurry, — and don't forget to call Andy."

"I'll be with you, Roger!" came from another window, in a voice Roger well knew. "Can you wait a minute?"

"No, I must hurry on, Andy. You tell Dick and Paul and the others to meet me on the green, and rouse up all the minute men you can. You will be out, won't you, Mr. Cresson?"

"Will I?" ejaculated the old farmer. "By gum, I jes' guess! Our rights air our own, an' no British redcoats shall take 'em away from us! Did ye call Zeke Bodley?"

"No."

"Then I'll do it, — an' I'll tell Small to hide them stores where the Old Nick himself can't locate 'em!" added Ira Cresson.

On went Roger down the dark road. Fortunately he knew every foot of the ground, other-

wise he might have gone down in many a ditch and hollow in his haste. Six more farmhouses were visited and the inmates aroused, and then Lexington green was reached.

As he came to the Square the roll of a drum sounded out on the night air. A dozen minute men were gathered there, and with them Captain Parker, and the drummer of the company that was in the habit of "trainin' " on Lexington green. The drum, one of the old-fashioned kind, small in the round and over two feet deep, was being tapped and rolled with great vigour, and men were running in from every direction, some only partly dressed, to learn what it all meant.

"General Gage's troops are coming!" That was the cry which soon went up, — a cry that sent the blood tingling through the veins of every man, woman, boy, and girl that heard it. Neighbours peered into each other's faces in the semi-darkness, and silently clasped hands. From this moment on they must stand shoulder to shoulder and maintain their rights, — or be the slaves of England for evermore!

CHAPTER X.

THE ADVANCE OF THE ENEMY.

“ROGER, my son!”

It was Mrs. Morse who uttered the words, as she clasped the breathless, panting youth to her breast, while the tears of joy streamed down her wan cheeks. “I was so fearful you would not return! Tell me of all that has happened to you.”

Mrs. Morse was not a strong woman, and for a week she had been upon her bed sick, with only Dorothy and Roger to attend to her wants. Her heart beat violently as she made her request.

“Don’t excite yourself, mother, dear,” said Roger, soothingly. “I am unharmed, as you can see. A detachment of British soldiers made me their prisoner, but I managed to escape.”

“But they misused you — ”

“It is over now, and some day I’ll get square with them for it. But there is no time now to talk of what has happened, mother. General Gage is sending a body of troops here to steal

our military stores, and to arrest Samuel Adams and John Hancock, — if they can be found, which I very much doubt,” continued Roger, with a short laugh, for he knew that the two political leaders had already been warned of the danger which threatened them.

“And where are you going?” questioned Mrs. Morse, quickly.

“I am going where every true Son of Liberty should go, — to the front!”

“Oh, Roger, they may shoot you! Stay at home here, with me and Dorothy, and perhaps—”

“Oh, mother, you don’t really mean that!” cried the boy, his eyes wide open in astonishment. “You wouldn’t have me play the coward, would you?”

“No, no, but —” Mrs. Morse grew very pale, and her lips trembled.

“You know, we boys, Paul Darly, Dick Winthrop, Andy Cresson, and a half dozen others, have organised a military company of our own. It was done mostly in fun at first, but we can drill and shoot as well as the men. I am at the head of the crowd, and Captain Parker said we could follow under his lead, if we wanted to. I think the other boys are already on the green, waiting for me. If I stay away —” Roger did not finish, but looked meaningly at his mother and then at his sister.

"Roger is big enough to fight," put in Dorothy Morse. "If I was a boy, I'd fight, myself!"

"Good for you, Dorothy!" cried the youth. "You'd make a good one, too. Now mother —"

A loud knocking on the door of the farmhouse interrupted the talk.

"Who is there?" demanded Dorothy, while Roger instinctively sprang for a musket hanging on the wall.

"It is I, Dick Winthrop. Where is Roger? I heard he was home again."

"You can see how it is, mother," went on the son, turning to his parent. "If you say stay at home, I won't disobey you, but —"

"Rouse ye, rouse ye, Sons of Liberty!

Rouse ye, rouse ye, to fight the enemy!"

Loud and clear came the song, sung by a dozen minute men, as they went tramping by, on their way to the green. The widow listened for a moment, and a strange flush came into her thin cheeks.

"Your father was a soldier, and he died from a bullet wound," she said, in a strangely unnatural voice. "Were he here, I know he would go, and you, — you must take his place, I suppose. Go, if you will, and my prayers and blessing go with you."

She held out her arms and strained him to her breast, while he kissed her several times. He

could not speak, and in silence he turned to his sister, who also caught him in her arms.

"Be careful of yourself, Roger," she said, entreatingly. "Be brave, — but don't be rash; and come back to us as soon as you are no longer needed. If it becomes necessary to lock up the lower part of the house, we shall watch for you from an upper window."

In a moment more he had joined Dick Winthrop outside. His ammunition was slung over his shoulder, and his musket was in his hands. By running, the two boys easily caught up in the rear of the minute men marching to the Square.

"Hurrah! here is Roger!" cried Paul Darly. "The boys are all here now but Ben Small."

"I fancy Ben is at home helping his father to get those military stores out of the way," said Roger.

"Boys!" — it was the voice of Captain Parker, who had strode up, sword in hand. "I have just given some instructions to the men, and now I'm going to give some instructions to you. I believe most of you know where the military stores have been secreted, or, rather, where they were secreted."

"Yes, sir," answered several.

"I want all of you to promise not to give the British soldiers any information on that point."

"We'll promise that, sir!"

"Not even if you are hard pressed for an answer? I know how Roger Morse has resisted, and it is a great credit to him; but how about the others?"

"They won't get a thing out of me!" said Paul Darly.

"Nor out of me!"

"Nor me!"

"Good! If you can put them on the wrong scent, so much the better. Do anything to prevent them from accomplishing the object of their raid."

"But aren't we going to fight?" demanded Andy Cresson.

"Yes, if it becomes necessary. But the advice of Samuel Adams, John Hancock, Doctor Warren, and others, is to let the British troops do the first firing. Then England cannot say that we were not willing to settle this difficulty without force of arms."

"Old Put would be fer waxin' 'em first lick!" put in the voice of a farmer standing near. "He was allers in fer fightin' first, an' talkin' it over arfterwards!" He referred, of course, to Israel Putnam, who, since the ending of the war with France, had retired to his farm in Connecticut. He did not dream of how the encounters so close at hand were to stir up the blood of the old "war horse."

"It is best to go slow first," went on the captain. "Of course, if it really comes to fighting, I shall try to do my full duty, and I will look to every man and boy here to do the same."

"Ye kin rely on us, cap'n!"

"I've been a-achin' tew wallop the redcoats fer over a year!"

"An' I've been a-achin' tew wallop 'em ever since they tried tew put a stamp duty o' three pence on the Almanac I bought in Boston."

"My wife sez she won't drink a drap o' tea until this leetle defucalty is settled," put in a raw-faced backwoodsman. "Ef we can't stand up fer our rights, then I'm goin' tew take tew the woods, an' jine hands with the Injuns."

So the talk ran on, while Captain Parker moved away, and men and boys broke up into groups to discuss the situation. Every one was more or less excited, and numerous were the plots and plans suggested to circumvent the approaching enemy.

It was now about two o'clock in the morning, and, the roll being called, it was found that there were a hundred and twenty-five men and ten boys assembled, all of whom were armed, the greater portion with flint-lock muskets. One old farmer carried a brace of pistols, and another, a fellow of Dutch extraction, a wide-mouthed blunderbuss.

As soon as the men had assembled, messengers had been sent down the road to watch for the ap-

proach of the enemy. A half hour dragged by slowly, during which several more minute men, living at a distance, came straggling in, and then two of the messengers came back.

"No troops in sight," said one of them.

"None at all?" queried several.

"Not a single redcoat. I reckon it's only another scare, boys."

"Humph! What's to do now?"

A short discussion ensued. Some of the men appealed to Roger, and asked him again concerning the redcoats he had met, and he went over all of the details.

"Something is up, that's certain," said Isaac Muzzy, an elderly patriot. "But it is mighty cold waiting out here for something to turn up."

"I will dismiss the company," announced Captain Parker, a few minutes later. "But I would not advise you to go a great distance off, and I wish every one to be ready to answer the roll of the drum. It may be well for some of you to watch the different roads. Break ranks!"

After this command the men and boys were not long in scattering, for, as Muzzy had said, it was a cold night, and but few of those who had hurried to the spot were warmly dressed. The greater portion of the men found their way into Buckman's tavern, while the others, and the boys, found shelter at a number of dwellings close by.

In the meantime, as Paul Revere had announced, the British troops were coming on as rapidly as their long, swinging route step could carry them. Under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Smith, eight hundred men — grenadiers, light infantry, and marines — had left Boston about ten o'clock in the evening. At the foot of the common they had embarked on the boats belonging to the ships of war in the harbour, and landed at Phipps's farm, afterwards known as Lechmere Point.

From this landing-place they were compelled to pick their way through the marshes to the old Charlestown and West Cambridge road. The moon was just rising, but it was often clouded over, and the redcoats frequently missed their way, and plunged into water and mud up to their knees. They moved forward silently, not a drum being beaten, and no loud talk being allowed. Up to this time they felt certain that their mission was unknown, and that they would take the patriots of Lexington and Concord completely by surprise.

It was not long before Menotomy, afterwards West Cambridge, was reached. Here, at Wetherby's tavern, a number of the members of the Colonial Congress had held a meeting only the evening before. Some of these men, Mr. Gerry, and Colonels Lee and Orne, had remained all night. As the troops came along, they were aroused by the innkeeper and told to flee. As

it would have been foolish to have remained in the face of eight hundred of their enemy, they wisely took the advice, and when the tavern was searched, a few minutes later, they could not be found.

The search given up, and Menotomy having barely been passed, a number of musket-shots fired in the distance told Colonel Smith that their advance had been discovered.

"Forward, men, forward!" was the command; and, as silently as before, they went on faster than ever. This hurried march, to men who had been lying around Boston for months, was very trying, and the fatigue, later in the day, was the means of bringing many of the soldiers to their fate.

"Major Pitcairn, you will take six companies of light infantry and march in advance," was Colonel Smith's command, when he saw that the whole body of his men could not keep up the strain. "Capture every rebel and minute man you see on the road."

"I will, sir," was Major Pitcairn's reply. "How far would you advise me to proceed?"

"No further than the two bridges at Concord. If we succeed in securing those, it will stop the advance of the rebels in that direction. Hark! there goes the roll of a drum. The whole country is arousing. I shall send back to Boston for reinforcements."

Major Pitcairn had hardly started to fill the

order given, when five officers, who had been sent out ahead, came back with the information that at least five hundred rebels were gathering at Lexington alone. This exaggerated report caused Colonel Smith to forward his call for more troops to General Gage without a moment's delay.

As the six companies under Major Pitcairn advanced, the alarm of the minute men became more and more general, and numbers of them were seen to rush from the various farmhouses as they were passed. Remembering his orders, the British major tried to capture all of these patriots, but, at last, one of them, Thaddeus Bowman, succeeded in getting away. With all possible speed Bowman made his way to Lexington, and it was he who brought the first certain intelligence that General Gage's troops were approaching.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BATTLE OF LEXINGTON.

“THEY are coming now, men !”

With lightning-like rapidity the news spread. Soon the drum was rolling as vigorously as before, and the patriots poured from Buckman's tavern, where they had been in hot discussion as to what was best to do, and from the neighbouring houses. It was half past four, and still dark.

The boys were on hand as quickly as the men. By order of Captain Parker, Sergeant William Munroe formed the men into two long lines at a spot a short distance beyond the meeting-house. Again there came a wait, and once more the men broke ranks, but were not allowed to leave the field.

At last a minute man from a farm down the road came rushing up. “They are in sight, captain !” he yelled. “They are coming up on the double-quick, too !”

“How many of them ?” questioned a score of voices.

“I didn't stop to see particularly, but there

must be nigh on to eight or ten hundred!" was the answer.

"Eight or ten hundred!" exclaimed Roger, as he glanced in dismay at the hundred odd men and boys scattered around the green.

"That doesn't look as if we would be able to do much," put in Paul Darly.

"Fall in!" It was the command of Captain Parker. The drum began to roll loudly, and the brave men of Lexington ran to take their various places. What did it matter if the enemy were a hundred thousand strong? Their duty was their duty, that was all there was to it.

They were a motley collection, tall, short, thin and fat. A few had old military uniforms which had done duty during the last war, but the most of them were in their farming clothes, woollen shirts, and with their trousers stuck in their heavy cowhide boots. Hardly two of their muskets were alike, although all were of the flint-lock, ramrod variety, for in those stirring days rifles and cartridges were unknown.

The men having fallen in, the boys, with Roger at their head, took their places behind them. Some few of the men were inclined to sniff at the lads, but others said they were glad to see them there. "A boy as kin shoot straight kin do ez much damage as a man," was the way they put it.

"Here they come!" It was impossible to

learn who uttered the cry. Looking down the road, those on the green saw a body of British soldiers moving towards them with double-quick step. At the head of the body rode an officer whom Captain Parker recognised as Major Pitcairn, of General Gage's staff.

As soon as the British officer saw the minute men drawn up in a line across the green, he reined in his horse and commanded his men to halt. After a minute of consultation, he was about to ride forward alone, when he suddenly changed his mind, and sent an under officer to the rear.

"He's going to bring up the rest of the troops," said the man who had first brought the news. "He doesn't dare to fight us with an equal number of men!"

"There may be some underhanded work afloat," said Captain Parker. He turned to Roger. "Morse, I believe you and the other boys can serve the cause better by taking stations behind yonder houses and barns. They may bring most of the troops up here, and while **we** are fighting one regiment, others may attempt to ransack the houses for stores. Now if you —"

"I understand, sir," put in Roger, eagerly, as a distant musket-shot interrupted the captain. "Come on, fellows, and be quick, before the red-coats become aware of what we are up to."

Roger led the way, and away went the boys

towards the nearest line of buildings. Once out of sight of the soldiers down the road, they scattered as Roger directed, some on one side of the Square, and others making a *détour* to the buildings opposite.

Roger found a convenient shelter around the corner of a smoke-house, standing a little down the road, in the direction of the enemy. A hundred feet farther on, behind a woodshed, crouched Paul Darly.

Hardly had Roger settled himself, than there came a tramping from a distance, and presently the first detachment of redcoats came up, quickly followed by a second, and then a third. All were well-drilled men, and in fighting trim, and they presented a most formidable appearance, especially when compared with those they had come to crush.

"Ye villains! ye rebels, disperse!" cried Major Pitcairn, as he rode slightly in advance and shook his sword in Captain Parker's face.

"What brings you here?" asked the captain, as coolly as he could.

"I come in the name of his most gracious Majesty, King George III., and I call upon you to disperse instantly," went on the British major, but without daring to come nearer. The looks on the faces of the gathered patriots did not please him.

"We are doing no harm on the green, major."

"I call upon ye to disperse! Yours is a gathering of rebels come together to resist the law!"

"The land is ours, and we'll do as we please here," came from a minute man in the ranks.

"What right has King George to send a thousand of his troops here?" demanded another voice.

"Silence! I will not allow myself to be addressed in this unseemly manner. Disperse, I tell ye, ere it be too late! Throw down your arms!"

With another angry shake of his sword, the British officer turned his horse around, and moved to the centre of his troops. An angry cry arose, taken up on both sides, and a gun went off somewhere among the ranks of the redcoats.

"Stand firm!" came the cry from Captain Parker, and hardly had the words left his lips than the British troops opened fire, and the long war, which was to result, after so many years of fighting and suffering, in the independence of our glorious country, was begun.

At the first volley, several of the minute men were seen to drop, two killed, and the others seriously wounded. Now came another volley from the redcoats, and then the fighting became general, as the British soldiers came on, and the minute men were scattered in several directions.

Roger's heart almost stood still as he heard that first volley, and saw three men he knew well throw up their arms and topple over on the grass. It was his first taste of grim war. A shudder shook his youthful frame, but it was all over in a second, and he clutched his loaded musket more firmly than ever.

A step to the other side of the smoke-house startled him. He looked back, to behold a British soldier creeping up, gun in hand. The soldier had his eye on Captain Parker, and presently he brought his weapon up to his shoulder, and took aim.

"Bang!" As the musket went off, the stock was knocked upward, and the bullet merely cut the air. By a quick movement of the barrel of his own weapon, Roger had saved a life.

"Ha!" The British soldier turned angrily, and, on catching sight of only a boy, scowled deeply. "You young rebel, I'll fix you for that!" And reversing his gun, he aimed a savage blow at Roger's head. Roger ducked, and in a moment more man and boy were struggling on the ground, with the man on top.

CHAPTER XII.

DOROTHY MORSE'S PERIL.

FOR awhile after Roger left the homestead, a silence fell between his mother and his sister Dorothy. Both were too much overcome to do more than sink down on a couch together and clasp hands. Dorothy was the first to break the silence.

"Never mind, mother, dear," she said, as she smoothed back the hair from that pale forehead. "I am sure Roger will take care of himself, and come back in safety."

"I thought as much when his father went to war," sighed the widow. "Oh, that this difficulty might be settled without an appeal to arms!"

"It cannot be, mother. See what all of our wisest men have done to avert disaster; see the work of Samuel Adams, John Hancock, Patrick Henry, and George Washington, — all gone for nothing. But I do not believe the conflict will be a long one. As soon as England sees we are in earnest, she will withdraw her troops and come to terms."

"You do not understand the temper of our

patriots, Dorothy," answered the mother, her tired eyes kindling. "They are willing to compromise now, but if once a blow is struck, it will be liberty or death with them."

"I wonder if they will fight in this vicinity?"

"I hope not, and yet—for Roger's sake—perhaps it would be better. To think one so young must take part! But he is his father over again."

Away in the distance could be heard the roll of a drum, and presently several neighbours hurried by, to join the others at the Square. Dorothy watched them from a window, and waved her hand to those she knew.

"We had better lock up the lower part of the house," said Mrs. Morse, a while later. "At such times as these there are many about seeking for a chance to plunder."

"We can get a fair view of the green from the back bedroom window," answered the girl. "It is growing quite light now."

Doors and windows were shut and barred, and the pair ascended to the upper floor and to the aperture Dorothy had mentioned. They had been seated there awhile when Dorothy noticed the gleam of muskets from down the road.

"It is the English!" she exclaimed. "See the red coats?"

"You are right, Dorothy, and see what a num-

ber of them : over five hundred at least, if not a thousand ! What can the minute men of Lexington and Concord do against such a host ? God spare them ! ”

“ The whole country is being aroused ; there will be many more men on our side to fight before night comes,” answered the daughter. “ See, the British soldiers have halted. I wonder if they want to parley.”

There was a painful silence, then, at that first volley, both leaped to their feet and wrung their hands.

“ Some have been shot, — pray God Roger is not among them ! ” ejaculated Mrs. Morse. “ If we — ”

A knocking on the front door below interrupted her. The knocking was sharp and loud, showing that some one was impatient to make himself heard.

“ Perhaps it’s Roger,” suggested Dorothy, and, without stopping to think twice, she ran below and flung the door open, to find herself confronted by two burly British soldiers.

“ Wha — what do you want ? ” she gasped, as soon as she could speak.

“ We want some provisions,” was the rough reply.

“ I haven’t anything for you. You’ll have to go somewhere else,” and, determined not to succour

the men whom she considered her country's worst enemies, she attempted to close the door and bolt it again.

She managed to slam the barrier shut, but ere the bolt could be slipped into place, one of the soldiers put forth his burly shoulder and forced the door back. In another moment both redcoats were inside of the house.

"You're a Yankee lass, and no mistake," sneered one, as he grinned at the trembling girl. "But, nevertheless, you've got to give us a lot of food, and that immediately."

"I'll not give you a mouthful," was the firm answer.

"Oh, yes, you will," put in the second soldier.

"Never!"

"I say you will, and what is more, you'll give me a kiss, in the bargain," went on the soldier. He had noted what a beautiful face Dorothy possessed, and now he caught her by the arm and attempted to embrace her.

"Let me go!" she screamed, trembling with both fear and anger; but the soldier held her fast, while his companion looked on in evident enjoyment of the scene.

"Dorothy! Dorothy! Who are those men?" came from Mrs. Morse. The skirmish on the green had caused her to pause before turning to follow her daughter.

"Help, mother! They are two rascally British soldiers, and they have come to steal food and insult us!"

"Ho! Ho! She calls a kiss an insult!" roared the redcoat who was looking on. "I'd make her give me a dozen for that, Patten."

"I will," answered Patten. "I'll warrant a beauty like you can make good pies," he went on to Dorothy, as he still held her fast. "Are there any in the house?"

"Let me go," was the only reply she vouchsafed him.

"Let my daughter go, and you can have all the food you wish," put in Mrs. Morse, from the stairs. "Do not thus insult two defenceless women in their own home."

"We didn't leave Boston to be preached at, woman," growled Patten, growing bolder as soon as he learned that only the women were around. "If you know where you are well off, you'll go up-stairs again."

"Let my daughter alone. If you don't, I'll — I'll —"

"Shoot him with the gun, mother," cried Dorothy. "It's behind the pantry door."

"Catch the old witch, Yorston," snarled the soldier who held Roger's sister. "Catch her, and lock her in a pantry, or somewhere. I'll hold this one while you do it."

Upon this advice the fellow named Yorston leaped towards Mrs. Morse. As feeble as she was, the widow endeavoured to escape his clutches and gain the weapon Dorothy had mentioned. But her movements were too slow to avail, and a few seconds later she felt herself clasped around the waist and borne bodily to a closet opening off of the hall. Into this she was thrust, the big wooden button was turned into place, and she found herself a prisoner in the dark.

Seeing how her parent was being misused, Dorothy struggled more wildly than ever to escape. She turned, twisted, struck, and scratched to get clear of her assailant, but all to no purpose. The burly redcoat held her with ease, and, panting and exhausted, she at last fell back in his arms, too weak to stand.

"Now, maybe, you'll come to terms," he laughed, coarsely. "Lead the way to the kitchen, Yorston. We'll get the provisions first, and then I'll finish with the spitfire."

Yorston led the way, and Patten came at his heels, with Dorothy still in his arms. The redcoat sat the girl down on a bench in one corner by the fireplace.

"Now don't you dare to move, if you know when you are well off," he said, suggestively. "Where do you keep the provisions?"

"You'll have to find out for yourself," she panted, not yet daunted.

"Not tamed yet, eh? Never mind; you'll come around before I leave, I'll warrant you that. Yorston, you take a look around while I watch her."

Yorston growled something about being compelled to do all the work, and moved out of the apartment. He soon found the larder, and came in with a large basket containing some fresh bread and butter, a loaf of cake, two pies, the remains of a broiled chicken, and several bottles of currant wine.

"Couldn't find any liquor," he muttered. "But the pies are fine; I just tried a piece."

"The boys will be looking for more than that," answered Patten, "seeing as they haven't had a mouthful since we left the barracks yesterday afternoon."

"There are some beans in the oven," said Dorothy, struck by a sudden idea. "If you'll let me go, I'll fix those for you."

"All right, fix 'em," muttered Patten. "But mind, now, no cunning work."

Dorothy leaped up from her seat. Her hand had been behind her, and now she slipped it under her apron. She walked to the fireplace and suddenly threw a little package into the blaze. At once a peculiar flame sprang up, and a strong scent of pepper filled the apartment.

"If you can stand that, you are welcome to do it!" she cried, and rushed into the dining-room, banging the door after her. There was no lock on the door, but she shoved a heavy table against it and held the article of furniture with all of her strength.

A fearful howl arose in the kitchen, mingled with the oaths of the men, for the pepper was of the strongest kind, and set them to sneezing, and their eyes to running. They tried to force the dining-room door, but, failing in this, sought for fresh air from some other source. Before they gained the dooryard they were half blinded, and both were sneezing with a rapidity which nearly dislocated their necks.

As Dorothy heard them go out, she sprang to the pantry into which her mother had been thrust. During her sick spells her mother suffered greatly with her lungs, and the girl knew that the closet was almost air-tight. In much fear she threw open the door.

Mrs. Morse had sunk down upon the floor. Now, as the door came open, her form fell forward at Dorothy's feet and lay there, still and stiff, like the form of a corpse.

CHAPTER XIII.

FROM LEXINGTON TO CONCORD.

To go back to Roger, at the thrilling moment when he and the British soldier were struggling on the ground behind the smoke-house, with the redcoat on top.

For the moment, when the heavy soldier came down on him, nearly crushing in his ribs, the boy fancied his last hour on earth had come. The wind was knocked completely out of him, and he could do nothing but gasp for breath.

"Thought it a smart trick to spoil my aim," cried the soldier. "How do you like that?" and raising Roger's head, he banged it against the ground.

"Let up, you — you would-be murderer!" cried Roger. "Why didn't you go out on the green and fight fair?"

"I'm obeying orders, that's why. And if I wasn't, I wouldn't allow a baby like you to — Wow!"

The redcoat gave a yell of anguish, for, having drawn up one foot, Roger launched out and gave him a terrific kick in his stomach, which was

unusually large and tender. Doubled up with pain, the soldier relaxed his grasp, and like an eel Roger squirmed from under him.

"Surrender!" he cried, as he picked up his musket. "Surrender, or I'll shoot you!"

"Ha!" gasped the redcoat. For the time being he could say no more, being utterly non-plussed by the turn affairs had taken, and still full of pain. His big bearskin hat lay at his feet, and he picked it up, and then reached for his musket.

"Drop that gun," went on Roger. "Drop it, I say!" and the musket fell where it had lain.

"Boy, boy, don't be a fool," muttered the soldier, with an uneasy glance at the weapon which was pointed straight at his breast.

"I'm not going to be a fool," replied Roger, as calmly as he could, although the situation was full of excitement.

"Do you know there are over eight hundred of us here?"

"I don't care if there are eight thousand. Such fighting as you would do is no fighting at all, — it is only slaying."

"You rebels have got to throw down your arms!"

"We are not throwing them down just yet."

"It is foolishness to resist the King."

"We are not resisting him, excepting so far as we are standing up for our rights. If you —"

A loud shouting on the road close at hand interrupted Roger. In a second more several minute men came leaping over the fence, and after them fully half a hundred redcoats.

Seeing his chance, the soldier Roger had made a temporary prisoner backed out among his companions. He wanted to take his musket, but the threat the youth had uttered made him hesitate, and finally, as the redcoats swept across the field back of the road, he went with them minus the weapon.

"The minute men are retreating!" It was a cry from Paul Darly, as he came up to where Roger stood. "The Britishers have killed eight of our fellows!"

"Retreating!" echoed the boy. "Oh, Paul!"

"It can't be helped, — eighty men can't stand up against eight hundred well-drilled soldiers."

"I wonder what the redcoats will do now."

"Most of them are making for Concord. See, there they go, up the road. Where did you get that musket?"

"Took it from a fellow I had a little row with."

"Good for you. I had a rumpus, too. Two of the redcoats tried to steal my gun, and I tripped one up and hit the other in the nose. I could have shot both of them, but, somehow, I didn't have the heart to do it."

"No, a fellow isn't quite equal to that, yet, Paul.

But come on, there goes the drum again." And both ran for the green, which minute men and red-coats had deserted but a minute previously.

"Come on, men! Come on!" came in the voice of several patriots. "The rascals are going on to Concord; let us join the Sons of Liberty there. We are less than a hundred strong, but there are two hundred men and boys at Concord to help us, and word has been sent to Salem and Marblehead for assistance. We'll make the British villains take to cover ere the sun goes down!"

At this there was a wild rallying cry. The drum beat louder than ever, and minute men and farmers responded from all directions. In the crowd were two men over seventy-five years old, tall, thin, and with flowing white hair. Age had left his mark upon each, yet they stepped forth boldly with their old-time muskets in hand.

"Hooray fer our blessed colonies!" shouted one. "May liberty be our portion henceforth an' for ever!"

"Down with King George III.," put in the second. "I fit when I was eighteen, an' I fit when I was thirty, an' I fit when I was sixty-four, an' I can fight ag'in! Hooray, ye young bloods, come on!" And with bared head he led the way, with men, boys, and even several women, at his heels. To those who had been hanging back, such leadership was an inspiration they could not resist.

Pell-mell down the road they went, with the military leaders trying to form the crowd into something resembling a company as they progressed.

Of course Roger and his companions went along. Andy Cresson had had his musket taken from him, and was given the weapon captured at the smoke-house.

"Where is Ben Small?" asked Roger, anxiously, as they moved along at double-quick. "I haven't seen him since the fighting started."

"Nor I!" exclaimed Paul Darly. "I wonder if his father has had trouble with the military stores he had on hand?"

"Perhaps." Roger mused for a moment. "Boys, what do you say if we go around by the back road and see if everything is all right over to Small's? We can catch up with the others again if we run a little. Who knows but what some of those rascals received information from Uriah Bedwell, or some of the other Tories, about the stores, and have gone there."

A vote was taken on the question, and it was agreed to do as Roger suggested. To reach the back road mentioned, they crossed a large potato field, and a bit of meadow land, and three minutes later came in sight of Randolph Small's place, a low, rambling structure, which dated back to the previous century.

A large barn and wagon-shed stood less than a

hundred feet from the house, and as the boys came up they saw two redcoats skulking around this. One of them had just pried off a board from the side of the wagon-shed, and was looking into a shallow opening beyond.

"Here we are!" he shouted, lustily. "Here's where the blasted rebels have their powder concealed. Must be about five hundred pounds of it."

"They've discovered our stores!" ejaculated Roger.

"Where can Ben and his father be?" put in Dick Winthrop.

"More than likely they are either dead or prisoners," said Andy Cresson. "I know neither of them would ever give in to the redcoats."

"No, the stores were placed in Mr. Small's charge because he is known to be so loyal to our cause," said Roger. "Shall we rush in and try to stop this work? I'm willing."

"Let us try to find out how many redcoats there are around first," said Dick.

Taking a position behind several convenient trees, the boys talked the matter over, and then separated to reconnoitre. Dick and Roger went to the upper end of the house, Andy and Paul to the lower, and the others to the barn and elsewhere.

Hardly had Roger and his companion reached

the house than they heard a murmur of voices coming from the dining-room. A window was up, and drawing closer they easily made out what was being said.

"You are villains, not soldiers!" came in the voice of Randolph Small. "You have treated me and my wife and my son shamefully."

"We know you have a quantity of military stores secreted here," came in the tones of a British officer. "We are bound to find them, or we'll know the reason why."

"Whatever is here is the property of myself and my friends. You have no right to take such property away."

"You are rebels, and have designed to use those stores against the King's troops. Out with it, man, and tell me where the stuff is located."

"Don't you tell a word, Randolph," put in Mrs. Small, who was as loyal as her husband.

"Silence, hussy, or you'll regret it!" exclaimed the red-coated officer, angrily.

"Don't you call my mother names," spoke up Ben Small. "If I wasn't your prisoner, I'd punch you well for it."

"Good for Ben!" whispered Dick.

"The three of them must be bound fast," answered Roger, in a low voice. The window was too high from the ground for either to obtain a view of the room beyond.

At that moment one of the soldiers from the barn came running towards the house. Roger and Dick just had time enough to drop behind a rose-bush when he passed them, and entered the house by the rear door.

"We've found the stores!" he cried.

"Found them, Darrow?"

"Yes, lieutenant. Come out and see for yourself!"

The British lieutenant left the house without delay, followed by a soldier who had been helping to guard the three prisoners. As they rushed towards the barn, Roger noted with satisfaction that the soldier was unarmed.

"Now is our chance, quick!" he cried, and leaped for the window-sill. In a second he was inside of the dining-room, and Dick followed.

"Roger Morse!" cried the Small family, in a breath. "Dick Winthrop!"

"How many of the redcoats are about the place?" asked Roger, as he proceeded to liberate Mr. Small and his wife, while Dick performed a similar service for Ben.

"I don't know," answered the man; "I've seen four."

"Half a dozen of our boys are outside, — we ought to be able to send them about their business," went on Roger.

"Two of the rascals left their muskets in the

kitchen," put in Mrs. Small. "You had better secure those, Randolph, now you are free."

"I will, Mary. Boys, will you help me fight these intruders?"

"We will!" came from Roger and Dick, in a breath.

"Good for you. Here, Ben, take this gun. I see it is all ready for use. Mary, you can have the other, if you want it. The boys have arms, and my musket is still safe over the fireplace. Come on!"

Randolph Small was about to make for the out-buildings, when Roger checked him.

"I have a plan," he said. "We have two of their guns. Now if we can get the gun of that third soldier and the pistol of the officer, we'll have them completely at our mercy."

"True; but how can it be done?"

"I saw the gun lying on the well-stone. I think I can creep up from behind the well and secure it."

"And the officer's pistol,—hush, here he comes now! Out of sight, all of you!"

Mr. Small was right; fearful the prisoners might help one another to get free, the British lieutenant was returning to the house on a run.

As he entered the kitchen, Randolph Small leaped upon him and bore him to the floor. The

officer struggled violently, but he was no match for the patriot and the boys who came to his assistance. Soon he found himself a prisoner, and, realising this, he called for help at the top of his powerful lungs.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CARE OF THE MILITARY STORES.

"SILENCE!"

"Help! help, men! Help! The rebels are here!"

"Better throw him into the cellar and lock the door on him," cried Roger, remembering how he had been treated by the heartless Sergeant Kegan. "Hurry, for the soldiers are coming. I'm going to try for that musket," and off he started at top speed, with Ben Small behind him, leaving Randolph Small and Dick to dispose of the prisoner as had been suggested.

The well-stone was gained while yet the owner of the musket was several yards away. Grabbing up the musket, Roger pointed it at the redcoat's head.

"Halt, and throw up your hands!"

"Heavens, boy! Don't shoot me!" howled the Britisher, in sudden alarm. He was the same man who had discovered the stores at the wagon-shed.

"Then do as I ordered."

"That is my musket, blast ye!"

"It's mine just now. Throw up those hands, I say."

Instead of complying, the redcoat leaped forward and knocked the muzzle of the weapon upward, at the same time trying to lay Roger on his back.

He was a heavy-set man, and the youth had all he could do to keep his feet. But now Ben Small rushed in and caught the fellow by the coat-tails, forcing him back.

"You villain! I'll teach you to mistreat my father and mother!" he cried. "Take that!" and down came his gun so heavily on the redcoat's head that the man was knocked flat. As he fell he struck the well-stone with his forehead, and he remained as he had fallen, senseless.

By this time the alarm had been taken by the other soldiers, as well as by the minute boys outside. The redcoats started towards the house, having heard the cry of their officer for help, but were stopped in the centre of the dooryard.

"Surrender!" came the cry from Roger and the others, and half a dozen muskets were pointed at the fellows.

"For heaven's sake!" gasped one. "Don't — don't shoot, boys! Wot does this mean?"

"It means your plan to steal our stores is defeated," answered Andy. "What shall we do with them, fellows?"

"We ought to shoot 'em, — just as they shot our men on the green," said one.

"No, no! don't shoot us!" howled one of the soldiers. "Do wot you please, but don't take our lives."

"You big cowards!" said Ben Small. "Boys, I have it. Let us heave them into the water-butt and cool them off."

All were willing, and in a trice the soldiers were hustled to the butt in question, and one after the other they were soused in, much against their inclination.

"Oh! oh!" spluttered one. "You'll suffer for this, mark my eyes!"

"Now you had better take them to the house, and put them into the cellar with their leader," said Roger. "If they get away they'll tell the other soldiers where the stores are, and bring a big detachment down on the place."

"True for you, Roger," cried Andy. "You always did have a long head on you. We can hold them prisoners until all of the other redcoats have left the vicinity."

The boys were just hustling the two dripping redcoats towards the kitchen door, when a shout from the front of the house attracted their attention. In some manner known only to himself, the officer who had been thrust into the cellar had freed himself, and crawled out of a narrow



"THE REDCOAT LEAPED FORWARD AND KNOCKED THE
MUZZLE OF THE WEAPON UPWARD."

window, and was now making up the road towards Concord as rapidly as his long legs would carry him. It was Mrs. Small who had seen his movement, and who was now announcing the fact as loudly as she could.

The pursuit of the fleeing Britisher was begun on the instant, Mr. Small, Dick, and several others joining in the chase. But the fellow had a fair start and was an excellent runner, and soon he outdistanced the patriots, and was lost to sight in a patch of woods between Concord and Winchester.

"Now the fat is in the fire," said Randolph Small, as he came to a halt, out of breath. "He will tell some one that the stores are here, and sooner or later we can expect an attack on the place."

"We'll have to remove the things," said Roger. "And not a moment must be lost. The question is, where had we best place them?"

A hurried consultation was held, and it was decided that the military stores be placed in charge of Roger and Dick, who were to secrete them in a milk-house back of the Morse homestead.

This decided on, the two soldiers in the doorway were tightly bound and taken into the house, where they might not see what was taking place. The redcoat who had been stunned was left where he had fallen.

"As soon as he comes to he can clear out," said Randolph Small. "And as soon as I think it is safe I'll let the other two go. It is useless to think of making regular prisoners until war is actually declared."

The stores weighed all of three hundred pounds, and, although in charge of Roger and Dick, all of the boys, including Ben Small, took part in removing them. The powder was in twenty-five pound sacks, and two of such sacks were all any of them could think of carrying.

"Keep a good lookout as you move along," were Randolph Small's final words of caution. "I'd go with you, only I feel certain that escaped officer will be back here with others."

The minute boys moved off in Indian file, with Roger at the front, and Andy Cresson in the rear. Each had his load strapped to his shoulders, and his musket in his hands ready for use. They did not take to the highway, but branched off for a short cut through a wheat field and a belt of timber land.

As they moved on, Roger asked one and another if they had seen anything of Hen Peabody, but all answered in the negative.

"Perhaps the very men who made me a prisoner captured him, too," thought Roger. "I hope he is alive and well."

"Don't you worry about Hen," said Dick, who

guessed Roger's thoughts. "He can take care of himself every time."

"It's queer who the men were who captured me," went on Roger.

"I'm of a mind they were Tories in sympathy with Uriah Bedwell. Father was saying only yesterday that he thought, if it came to war, the Tories would be trying all sorts of underhanded games on the minute men, in order to cripple their strength. Living right among us, they won't dare come out for King George III. openly."

"That must be the truth of it, Dick. It was underhanded, and no mistake. They wouldn't let me see them, and not a one spoke a word to me."

On went the minute boys. The woods had now been reached, and here they had to pick their way over sharp rocks and through a tangle of brush and briars. The journey was far from pleasant, but no one grumbled; indeed all were glad to think they were doing something to aid the cause of liberty.

Suddenly, a number of voices broke upon their ears, coming from a hollow some distance to their right. Roger immediately called a halt.

"Listen!" he whispered, holding up his hand.

They all listened. At first they could not make out a word of what was being said, but presently Roger recognised the well-known tones of the Morses' hired man.

"By gum! I tell you thar hain't nuthin' tew be got out o' me!" Hen was saying. "Ye kin threaten me, an' lambaste the life out o' me, if it gives ye any pleasure. I wouldn't give in tew a lot o' lop-jawed Britishers ef it cost me my airthly existence, b'gosh, so thar now!"

"It's Hen! And he's a prisoner!" ejaculated Roger.

"We'll make you come to terms, before we are through with you," came in the voice of Sergeant Kegan. "The men who captured you and the boy said you knew where the stores at Small's were secreted, and we are bound to make you speak. Boys, is that iron hot yet?"

"Will be in a minute, sergeant," came in the voice of the soldier Nelson.

"A hot iron on the sole of your foot will loosen your tongue, I'll wager," went on the British under officer, harshly. He was in a very ugly frame of mind, for his early morning search for Samuel Adams and John Hancock had proved an utter failure. He now had orders to seize the stores at Randolph Small's place, and then join the troops in their movement on Concord. The British orders had become mixed up, and he had no knowledge of the fact that a Lieutenant Goslem had already attacked Small's, with the result the reader knows.

"They mean to torture Hen," said Roger, to Dick, as the two drew closer. "I cannot permit it."

"It is awful," answered his companion. "But what can you do? We won't dare to risk having these stores taken from us."

"Let us hurry and hide the stores in some dry spot on the rocks. We can come back for them as soon as Hen is liberated. There are only six of the Britishers, while there are eight of us, and Hen will make nine. Will you do it, boys?"

The question was put and settled on the spot, that they should do as Roger suggested. In less than three minutes a hiding-place was selected for the military stores, and then, ready to fight their best, the minute boys of Lexington set out to rescue Hen.

CHAPTER XV.

SERGEANT KEGAN IS SURPRISED.

"WILL you answer now?"

"Not a word, by gum!"

"Don't you see this bayonet is red-hot?" went on Sergeant Kegan, as he held the object up within a few inches of his victim's face.

"Not bein' blind, o' course I kin see," returned Hen. "So ye calkerlate tew brand me with thet, eh?"

"Yes,—unless you tell me what I want to know."

"Ye are a nice, Christian gentleman, ain't ye?" said Hen, scornfully. "Why, the cannibals o' Afriky would be ashamed tew hev ye fer a fifth cousin, tew my way o' thinkin'. If ye air sot on brandin' me, why, go ahead. I calkerlate the boys will look at it ez a badge o' honour, b'gosh!"

"Good for Hen!" Roger could not help but exclaim, though in a whisper. "He is a patriot to the last ounce of blood in his veins!"

"I have an idea," put in Paul Darly. "Hen is

bound to that big beech-tree. Why can't one of us slip up behind him, and cut his bonds?"

"I was thinking of it," answered Roger.

"I'll do it," went on Paul. "I have my pocket-knife ready, as you see."

He slipped away from the others, who waited for the outcome of his action. In the meantime, Sergeant Kegan continued to threaten his prisoner. At last, in a rage at being unable to move Hen, he shoved the red-hot bayonet against the Vermonter's chin.

At that instant Paul cut the rope which held Hen a captive. The farm-hand did not realise who had come to his assistance so opportunely, but he did realise that he was free, and, drawing back his right fist, he let out a smashing blow, which landed full on Sergeant Kegan's nose, drawing blood, and causing that unworthy individual to land, with a resounding thump, flat on his back.

"Take thet, with the compliments o' a true Son o' Liberty!" cried Hen, and then, as the speed of his tumble caused the sergeant's legs to fly up in the air, the Vermonter supplemented the blow with a vigorous kick from his cowhide boot, which caused the Britisher to roar with pain.

"Oh, oh! he'll kick me to death! Capture him, somebody, everybody!" yelled the under officer. "Why didn't you tie him tight, Stubbs?"

"I did tie him tight," answered Stubbs, rushing up, followed by the others. "See, the blasted rope is still fast to his wrists. It's bloomin' treachery —"

"The minute men are at hand!" yelled another, who had caught sight of one of the boys with his musket. "We are surrounded!"

"Heaven help us!" groaned Stubbs. "Oh, sergeant, sergeant, why didn't you let us join the other troops, as we wanted to do?"

"Drop your muskets, every man of you!" shouted Roger, in the deepest tones he could command. "Drop them, or every man will be shot on the spot!"

Stubbs had picked up his weapon, but at these words he dropped it as if it were a hot potato. Another soldier also had his gun, and this likewise fell to the ground.

In the meantime Hen had slipped behind the trees, and a glance around and a few hurried words from Roger made the situation clear to him. Seizing a gun from one of the lads, he hopped into the clearing again.

"Air ye goin' tew surrender, or not?" he demanded, pointing the weapon at Sergeant Kegan's breast. "Stay whar ye air an' answer."

"We — we will surrender!" faltered the sergeant. He was on his knees, the blood was flowing from his nose down to his chin, and altogether

he presented both a dismaying and comical appearance.

"Thar's whar yer head ez level fer onct," drawled Hen. "Now then, down on yer knees, every skulkin' one o' yer!"

The soldiers hesitated and glanced around. From a tree here and a bush there gleamed the muzzle of a musket. They felt they must be surrounded by a large force, and that, consequently, resistance would be useless. One by one they dropped down on their knees, like puppets in a puppet show."

"Isn't this rich!" whispered Andy Cresson, who was light-hearted and appreciated a joke more than most people. "I don't know but what Hen could manage them single-handed now, they are so thoroughly frightened."

"Will Roger Morse please show hisself?" called Hen, ceremoniously; and the youth stepped into the clearing, his musket still ready for use.

At the sight of another of his late victims, Sergeant Kegan gave a dismal grunt, and the teeth of Stubbs began to chatter, while the others looked uneasy.

"Wot ez your idee o' what should be done with these air varmin?" questioned the Vermonter. "Wouldn't it be best tew hang 'em right now?" and he winked suggestively at Roger

"Hang us!" screamed the sergeant.

"Hang us!" moaned Stubbs. "Ho, don't do it, gentlemen, pray don't do it!"

"I suppose you haven't forgotten how you treated me, Sergeant Kegan?" said Roger, coldly.

"My boy, my dear boy, it was all a mistake," faltered the under officer, as he wiped the blood from his face with his coat sleeve. "I would not dream of doing it again, upon my honour."

"I wouldn't give a fiddlestick fer your honour," put in Hen. "Whar do ye carry it, in a pill-box?"

"My dear man, I represent the British nation, don't forget that," returned the sergeant, feeling that he must in some manner strengthen his own position.

"You misrepresent that nation, you mean," said Roger. "You speak about honour; a man of honour is a gentleman the world over, whether he is an American, an Englishman, a Frenchman, or a Turk. You don't deserve to wear a uniform of any sort. I believe if General Gage knew how you had acted, he would have you kicked out of your company in double-quick order."

"You air right thar, Roger. Thet British general may be bad enough, but I calkerlate he ain't no brute, sech ez this piece afore us."

The sergeant wanted to reply, — to say something awful, — but a look from Roger silenced him. He realised that his former actions had

aroused the lion in the boy, and that, unless he was careful, the youth would speedily seek to square results, and perhaps more.

The minute boys and Hen were at a loss as to what should be done with the redcoats. As told before, they did not wish to make any prisoners, yet to let them go would be foolhardy. Hen solved the problem so well that all at once agreed to it.

Having stripped the sergeant and his men of all of their weapons, powder, and ball, they proceeded to bind each individual to a separate tree, doing it in such a manner that each would be able to free himself, sooner or later, although not at once. After being bound, all were deprived of their boots and stockings, so that, even when at liberty, they would be sadly handicapped so far as taking active part in the attacks throughout the district.

"Ye won't do much runnin' around in these air woods in yer naked feet," grinned Hen. "An' ef ye behave yerselves, we'll send the butes back to ye by special Boston messenger."

"I can't walk a step without me boots!" bawled Stubbs. "I would cut me feet to pieces."

"If you can't walk, then sit right down here till the muss is all over," said Andy. "You'll be safer here than you would be in battle, anyway, — that is, if the wolves don't take it into their heads to chew you up."

"Wolves! Are there any of those horrible creatures about here?" groaned Stubbs, while even the faces of Sergeant Kegan and Nelson grew pale.

"Oh, there are not more than a hundred or so, — but they are rather large," went on Andy, with a wink at Roger; for it was well known to the boys that the wolves rarely visited that section of the timber land, they preferring the district where Roger had had such a thrilling adventure.

"A hundred!" howled Stubbs. "We'll be chewed up alive. Release me, — I will pay you all I am worth!"

"You are worthless, — to me," answered Andy, lightly. "But I'll tell you how you can get rid of the wolves," he continued, confidentially.

"How?" questioned Stubbs, eagerly.

"Sing Yankee Doodle to them just as hard as you can. They have British blood in their veins, and they'll skedaddle in double-quick order."

Stubbs groaned dismally. The boys laughed at Andy's words; and with a look around, to see that the redcoats were still tightly bound, they quitted the spot, the sergeant growling roundly, under his breath, as they departed.

When Hen heard what the boys were doing, he readily agreed to assist them, and he walked off with some of the powder over one shoulder, and the weapons of the defeated Britishers over the

other. As the party trudged along, he told of what had happened to him since he and Roger had separated at Uriah Bedwell's mansion.

"I war collared from behind, tew," he said, "an' the bag put over my head nearly choked me ter death. But when the men got me to Golby's old barn I fit 'em so they couldn't hold me, an' I ripped the bag off. The men war a set o' Tories, an' Uriah Bedwell's brother war among 'em. I hed jes' escaped from 'em, when thet confounded Britisher kem up with hez redcoats an' cotched me ag'in, an' I war their prisoner till you kem up, bless yer for it !"

"Uriah Bedwell had better look out for himself," said Roger, seriously. "He doesn't know the temper of our people. He may be laying up a lot of trouble for himself."

"That's right," put in Paul Darly. "They may burn the house over his head," he added; but neither he nor the others dreamed that at that very moment the mansion was razed to the ground, that Mrs. Bedwell and her daughters had taken refuge at the home of a kind neighbour, and that Uriah Bedwell was fleeing for his very life.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE HOME GUARD TO THE RESCUE.

"MOTHER, mother, speak to me! Oh, mother, speak, and say you are not dead."

Such were the words which burst from Dorothy Morse's lips, as she picked up the inanimate form, and bore it to a couch in the sitting-room.

For the time being the soldiers who had treated her so rudely were forgotten. Her one thought was of her mother, and, as she bent over that beloved form, her heart almost stopped beating. What if her mother were dead? Oh, she could not bear to think of it!

A little gasp told her that there was still hope, and, rushing up to a bedroom, she procured the nostrums her mother was wont to use when overcome in this manner. Practice had made the girl a good nurse, and, after working over Mrs. Morse for a few minutes, she had the satisfaction of seeing her mother open her eyes, and stare about her.

"Oh, Dorothy, — what — what —"

"Be easy, mother, do not excite yourself, you are safe now."

"But those dreadful redcoats —"

"I fought them off, I think they'll go away now. I gave them a dose of burnt pepper, and they are out in the yard sneezing it off. It was shameful to put you in there, where you could scarcely breathe!"

"It was not that which made me faint, my child; it was the thought of your peril. You say they are in the yard? Run to the bedroom window, and tell me when they leave. I'll not feel safe until then."

Dorothy had already thought of this, and a second more found her at an upper back window. She was just in time to see the two soldiers enter the kitchen again.

"Have they gone, child?" asked Mrs. Morse, feebly, as she, too, came up-stairs.

"No, mother, not yet. I'm going below a moment," answered Dorothy. She felt it would be dangerous to alarm her parent more than was absolutely necessary. Down the stairs she sped, with incredible swiftness, to arrive at the barricaded dining-room door just as the soldiers started to force it. The men had opened every window in the kitchen, so the burning pepper no longer hindered their movements.

"Open that door!" came in the voice of Patten. "Open it, lass, or it will be the worse for ye!"

"We're bound to get in," added Yorston. "So

clear the stuff away there, unless you want things smashed up."

"I won't; go away, I'll shoot you!" cried Dorothy; but the men paid no attention to either command or threat. Behind the wood-box lay an axe, and seizing this, Patten began to demolish the door with it. In less than a minute the upper portion gave way, and both men leaped over the obstructions into the dining-room.

As they came on, Dorothy uttered a scream and retreated to the hall. But realising she could not hold this position against them, she mounted the stairs and darted into the room her mother had entered.

"Dorothy, Dorothy! are they coming up here?" gasped Mrs. Morse, and then, as she realised such was a fact, she sank back on a bed all but overcome.

With the quickness of lightning the girl shut the door of the chamber, and turned the wooden button in place. Then she tried to push the bed against the door, but that article of furniture was too solid and heavy for her strength.

"Jump out of the window and run to some neighbour!" panted Mrs. Morse. "It is your only chance."

"And leave you, mother? No, I'll never do that. Perhaps I can summon some one," went on the girl, and threw up the window. "Help! help!

he— Heaven be praised, there is Roger and Hen, and a number of others! Roger, come quickly! We are in great peril!”

“The Old Nick take the luck!” muttered Patten, from the hallway. “She is calling to somebody.”

“Perhaps that is only a blind. The next house is too far away for any one to hear,” said his companion.

Both were disturbed, however, and when they heard a quick step in the dooryard, they turned to hurry below.

“What is it, Dorothy?” yelled Roger, as soon as he came within hailing distance.

“Two British soldiers are in the house. They have abused mother and me shamefully!” panted the girl. “Be careful, they are desperate men, and are armed with guns and our axe.”

“Two more o’ the varmin,” muttered Hen, who had come up alongside of Roger. “Wall, I calkerlate tew be in fust-class fightin’ trim, b’gosh!”

“I’ll teach them to molest mother and Dorothy!” said the boy, his cheeks flushing hotly; for to him this was worse than anything that could happen to himself, so dearly did he love his parent and his sister.

Half a dozen bounds took him into the kitchen, with Hen at his heels. Both saw the smashed door

and leaped over it. At the foot of the stairs they met Patten and Yorston coming down.

"What are you doing in this house?" demanded Roger, catching Patten by the arm. At the same time Hen nabbed Yorston, just as the latter was about to leap over the banister.

"Let go of me!" growled Patten, aiming a savage blow at Roger's head with his fist.

Roger obeyed the order to let go, and dodged. The next second Patten received a telling blow straight in the mouth, which loosened several of his teeth, and brought his head with a thump against the stairs behind him. Before he had a chance to recover, Roger was at him again. Catching the soldier by the feet, he hauled him down the stairs, with a thump of the head on every step, and, once on the hallway floor, he sat down on Patten's chest so suddenly that every rib fairly cracked.

"You miserable wretch!" he cried, as he cuffed Patten first on one ear and then on the other. "Is this the way you go to war, — sneaking around houses, when the men are out, to frighten the women-folks and steal what you can lay hands on? I've met some pretty mean men during the past couple of days, but you are the meanest of the lot! There's for you! and there's another, and another!"

"Don't! Let up! Have a bit of mercy!"

howled Patten. "You've smashed in my ribs! Help, Yorston; take the young tiger off!"

But Yorston was in no condition to assist anybody. Hen had first floored him, and, on arising, the Vermonter had caught him by the throat and run him up against the wall in such a fashion that he was in great danger of being strangled to death. His tongue was hanging out of his mouth, his eyes were bulging from their sockets, and all he could do was to wave his hands imploringly at his assailant to let up.

"A pair o' skunks, thet's wot they air," snarled Hen. "Thar! Now stand still an' behave yourself!" And he finished with a squeeze which sent Yorston staggering to a corner, and made him think his Adam's apple was split in twain.

By this time, Dorothy had opened the upper door, and was out at the top of the stairs, with her mother clinging to her shoulder, too much overcome by the excitement to stand alone.

"Roger, my son, be careful!" pleaded the sick mother. "He may stab you, or something."

"I'm done with him now, mother," was the answer, as the youth arose. "I fancy you'll remember the son and brother of these two ladies when you meet me again," he added, with a stern look at Patten.

The redcoat was about to answer, but that look

caused him to keep quiet, just as it had silenced Sergeant Kegan.

"Can — can we go now?" gasped Yorston, as soon as he could speak. His voice sounded cracked and scared.

"Yes, yes, let them go," said Mrs. Morse. "The sooner they depart, the better."

"But they shall not take their weapons," said Roger. "If they had them they would use them against our men."

"They are too much of cowards to fight," put in Dorothy. "But I think, too, it will be best to keep their weapons."

The guns of the two redcoats were soon found, and to these were added a pistol Patten carried, and a dagger belonging to Yorston. The men were also compelled to give up their boots, as had been the case with the sergeant's party.

"I'll hev enough butes tew go in the bute business with, soon," drawled Hen. "Blame me, thet dealer in Boston ez stuck me on the butes I'm a-wearin' was a Tory, an' I'll git squar, ef I kin find a pair o' the collection tew fit me."

"Are we to go forth barefooted?" grumbled Patten, with a sour look on his swollen face.

"Ye air, an' take thet tew remember us by," ejaculated Hen, and kicked first one and then the other through the kitchen and out of the back door. "Remember, ye'll be shot on sight!" he

added, and at this the two redcoats hobbled off as fast as the state of the stony and sharp road would permit.

Dick and the other boys were anxious to know what was up, but before coming to the house they took good care that all the military stores were secreted in the milk-house near the barn, as previously agreed. Dick, Paul, and Andy came up just as Patten and Yorston hobbled off.

"I declare, nobody is safe any more," said Dick. "I do hope everything is right at home. Only mother, Nellie, and baby Johnny are there."

"Bridget McNally is working at our house," said Paul. "She's not a man, but I reckon she could scare most of those sneaking redcoats into two fits. Oh, she's a terror, when she gets wound up!"

"Which shows that even a hot-tempered Irish woman is of some account at times," put in Andy. "My mother has locked up the house and gone over to the Bradley's. There are five women-folks there, and I'm not worried but what they'll take care of themselves. Mrs. Bradley has killed two Injuns in her time, — shot 'em at two hundred yards, too."

In a short while the boys were all gathered at the house. Despite the excitement, they were hungry, and Mrs. Morse insisted upon their partaking of the food Patten and Yorston had in-

tended to carry off. But all were impatient to walk to Concord, to learn what was going on, and the lunch was a brief one. Hen offered to remain behind, to protect the ladies, but Mrs. Morse would not hear of it.

"You go with them, and keep an eye on Roger, Hen," she said, drawing the hired man aside. "Do not let him run into needless danger. Remember, he is my only boy, and he must grow up to take his father's place," and she wiped the tears from her eyes.

"I'll do my best, Mrs. Morse," said Hen, soberly. "I'll do my best. But Roger ez as brave ez a lion, an' thar ain't no holdin' him in sometimes, jes' like his pap, — you know ez well ez I. But I'll do my best, ez I said afore, an' the Lord be with us all!"

Matters had already been arranged with Dorothy, concerning the milk-house treasure, as the minute boys were wont to call it. The girl was given a list of the men who could be trusted, and these, if they wanted powder and ball, could have some, but nobody else.

"Rather than let the enemy have it, I would blow the milk-house sky-high," said Roger, and Dorothy, patriotic girl that she was, agreed with him.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE BATTLE OF CONCORD.

THE battle of Lexington, the first in our War of the Revolution, had been of short duration. Eight men had been killed, and about twice that number wounded. Among those who had given up their lives in the cause of liberty were Jonas Parker, who had said he would never run from the redcoats, Robert Munroe, the standard-bearer of the minute men, and Jonathan Harrington, who has also been mentioned. Poor Harrington was shot in sight of his own house, and died as he was staggering forward in a last effort to reach the arms of his wife, who came rushing to meet him.

The loss to the British had been trivial, for the minute men had been scattered before opening a solid volley. Two privates had been wounded, and Major Pitcairn's horse was also struck. But the redcoats were alarmed, thinking the minute men would come at them again; and it was not until Colonel Smith arrived with the remainder of the troops that they felt safe enough to give a

cheer and fire a volley in token of their so-called victory.

The distance from Lexington to Concord was about six miles, and, as soon as Colonel Smith came up, the entire body of British troops set off for Concord. With them went those who had temporarily deserted the ranks to obtain food, drink, and whatever else came to hand. All, including Patten and Yorston, were closely pursued, and, before Concord was reached, six of the British were taken prisoners.

At the time of which I write, Concord was only a small town, lying between two hills, with the Concord River flowing to the west and the north of it. The place contained a church, a courthouse, a jail, several stores, and a blacksmith and wheelright shop. The houses were very much scattered. The road leading to it from Lexington ran partly along the edge of a hill, and this hill ended in Concord, at a spot where was situated the liberty pole and the green. The river, a sluggish stream, was crossed by two bridges, called the North Bridge and the South Bridge, and it was these bridges which Major Pitcairn had been called on to guard, that the patriots from beyond might not pour in upon the British troops while they ransacked various places in search of military stores, and hunted for rebel leaders to place under arrest.

Dr. Samuel Prescott was the patriot who gave the alarm in Concord, and in Lincoln, a village close by. This was about two o'clock in the morning, and when it was learned that the British soldiers were approaching Lexington, the minute men, militia, and other citizens worked like beavers to remove the military stores to various places of safety. Some goods were hidden in garrets, others in dry cellars, and in one case a lot of powder and ball were packed in bundles and hidden among the branches of a clump of evergreen trees.

Colonel Barrett, who commanded the Concord forces, was at the head of the activity, and it was not long before the work was accomplished, and then came the task of drawing up the minute men and instructing them. In the midst of the scenes was the Reverend William Emerson, the clergyman of the place, who went about trying to quiet the fears of the terror-stricken women and children, who, too frightened to remain at their homes alone, had followed the men-folks to the green.

At last came the news that the British had arrived at Lexington and opened the fight. The slaughter was exaggerated, and added greatly to the fear of the women-folks. The matter was hotly discussed for a few minutes, and then the minute men from Lincoln marched down the road

to meet the enemy, while the men of Concord took a stand at the liberty pole.

Soon, just as the sun was rising over the hills to the east, the British troops were seen, coming along the road as fast as their tired condition would permit. Their guns and bayonets glistened brightly, and they presented a formidable appearance. Seeing their number, the Lincoln minute men thought it useless to make a stand, and retreated to Concord Centre, and presently all of the Americans fell back to a hill some distance back of the town, and midway between the two bridges previously mentioned.

As soon as the British arrived in Concord they took post around the liberty pole, while one detachment was sent off to the North Bridge and another to the South. Those going to the former place presently split, one part remaining at the bridge and the other moving forward to Colonel Barrett's home, two miles distant, to blow up the powder-magazine located there.

The British soldiers were tired and hungry, having had nothing to eat since leaving their barracks the evening before, and consequently they arrived in Concord in anything but a happy frame of mind. Finding no troops to resist them, they set about destroying whatever was closest to hand.

"Down with that liberty pole!" was the cry, and axes were quickly procured, and soldier after

soldier hacked at the pole, until at last it fell with a crash, while the redcoats cheered loudly.

"Now for the court-house! Set it on fire!" was the next cry, and the torch was applied in several places; but before the fire was fairly started, the attention of the soldiers was attracted elsewhere, and, as they ran off, a Mrs. Moulton, brave woman that she was, rushed in and beat out the flames, and the building was saved.

In the meantime, other soldiers had broken into a miller's storehouse and smashed open sixty barrels of flour. They also discovered three cannon and knocked off the trunnions, and demolished the stock of the wheelwright's shop. As they passed, here and there they demanded food and drink of the trembling women and children, and threatened to shoot if it were not immediately forthcoming. These are not overdrawn statements, they are matters of history.

While these stirring scenes were occurring in the town, minute men from various other places, Carlisle, Chelmsford, Acton, Littleton, and Westford, poured into the neighbourhood and joined the patriots stationed on the hill. All were now growing fearful that the British would fire the town, and it was decided to make an aggressive movement by trying to dislodge the troops stationed at the North Bridge.

"I'll go, and I'll do it," said a Major Buttrick,

and he was placed in command of several companies. They were soon at the bridge, and, seeing them coming, the British began to tear up the planking, so that it could not be crossed.

"Stop that work!" commanded Buttrick, but, instead of doing as ordered, the British troops opened fire, killing two minute men and seriously wounding another.

"Fire, fellow soldiers, for God's sake, fire!" cried Buttrick, as he waved his sword, and then and there the minute men of our country opened up in true military style, killing one redcoat and wounding another. The blaze of the flintlocks brought consternation to the British, who had all along thought that our patriots would not really dare to do battle against the King. They retreated in confusion, and the minute men followed them across the bridge, where a second skirmish took place with equally disastrous results. Finding they could not hold their own, the detachment sent to guard the bridge fled for the centre of the town, while the minute men rejoined their friends, carrying their dead and wounded with them. A short while later the British came back for those of their own who had been shot down, and were not molested.

The excitement was now at a fever-heat, and from all sides could be heard the distant roll of drums and gun-shots, calling the patriots into the

[missing illustration:
"Fire, fellow soldiers, for God's
sake, fire!, ' cried Buttrick"]

[missing illustration:
"Fire, fellow soldiers, for God's
sake, fire!,' cried Buttrick"]

field. As the number of minute men increased, so did the anxiety of the British Colonel Smith, and at last, feeling he could not hold the town much longer, he went about for conveyances in which to carry along his dead and wounded, and sent special messengers along the back road to inform General Gage of the situation, and to ask for aid should he have any difficulty in getting back to Boston.

It was noon when the redcoats turned their backs upon Concord, with many a jeer at the women and the helpless old men. "We'll come back again, and wipe you out, one of these days!" came the cry, to which those left behind hardly dared to answer. As they were passing the last of the town buildings, they attempted to set fire to some again, but once more Mrs. Moulton, aided by a number of others, extinguished the flames before serious damage was done. The soldiers took with them whatever of food and drink they could carry, for the day was a warm one, and a march of eighteen miles lay before them,—a march those who survived never forgot.

As the redcoats left, the minute men came rushing in, and the stories told by the women and old men only added to the righteous indignation of the sturdy patriots. "Let's go after 'em, boys, and teach 'em a lesson!" was the cry. "Who's afraid? Hurrah for our colonies!" and before the officers could stop them,

even if they felt so inclined, a portion of the minute men were on the march, and the others quickly followed, some taking to the road, and others to the fields and woods on the sides of the highway, hemming the redcoats in, until, as one British officer wrote afterwards, "it seemed as if the rebels dropped from the clouds, they were that thick, and sprung up in such unexpected places." Scarcely had the town centre been vacated, than the patriots opened their fire from behind, and, five minutes later, the fire from the hills on one side, and the lowlands on the other, commenced.

It was at this time that Roger, Hen, and the others left Lexington for the scene of the conflict.

"Matters must be getting lively at Concord!" exclaimed Roger, as they strode forward, he setting a pace which the others followed with difficulty. "Hark, the shots are growing more and more frequent."

"Them air Britishers hed it most all their own way at Lexington," said Hen. "But I calkerlate ez how our boys hev found thar wind by this time. Gee shoo! hark tew thet!"

That was a long, clear roll of musketry, followed by at least two dozen shots in rapid succession. A score of reports came after, at intervals of several seconds.

The shooting made the nerves of the boys and

Hen tingle, and they increased their pace until it was little short of a run. In less than half an hour, they came in sight of the outskirts of Concord, and here several others joined them.

"Hullo, here come some of the Britishers on a run!" suddenly cried Dick. "Look, there must be at least a hundred of them!"

"They have been routed!" put in Roger, his heart swelling with pride. "See, the minute men are after them, and they are scattering like frightened sheep!"

"We hed better take to the fields," observed Hen. "Sech a body ez is comin' will sweep us down like er cateract, b'gosh!"

"Hen is right," answered Roger. "Come on, fellows, Cadmus's meadow will afford — Hullo!"

Roger stopped and looked over his left shoulder. A score of redcoats had burst through the woods at that point, coming up just a bit to their rear. Seeing the main body of their troops pelting down the road, they stopped short to wait for them to come up.

"We'll be hemmed in!" ejaculated Andy. "There are more of the redcoats over in the woods!"

"Can't we take to the meadow on the right?" asked another of the minute boys, anxiously.

"No, no, it's full o' bog holes," answered Hen,

quickly. "Sneak to one side o' the road, behind the stone wall!"

The boys started to follow this suggestion. But scarcely had Ben Small gotten over the wall than the soldiers in the rear rushed up, those coming down the road followed, and the little band found itself surrounded.

"Surrender, ye rebels!" shouted the leader of the British troops. "Throw down your arms and disperse!"

The words had hardly left his lips than, in their haste, and in their rage at being forced to retreat, one of the companies of redcoats fired a volley directly at the boys. Their aim was not fatal, but Paul Darly was struck in the arm, and another boy, named Limner, was seriously wounded in the thigh.

This attack aroused the blood of the young patriots to a fever-heat. "Shoot them; they have wounded me!" cried Paul Darly. Bang! went Hen's musket, to be followed by a shot from every one of the minute boys remaining uninjured. Three of the redcoats were hit, the one Hen had aimed at, fatally; and the enemy stopped short, in wonder and amazement to think that boys had done this deed.

"At them! Shoot the young villains!" came the cry, as soon as the Britishers could recover; and again the redcoats came on, and in an instant

more the boys were pressed closely in a desperate hand-to-hand struggle.

"Keep together, and back up against the stone wall!" shouted Roger, as with reversed musket he banged an eager redcoat over the head and stretched him senseless. "Don't let them separate us!"

"Take thet! an' thet! an' thet!" Hen was heard to yell, as he swung his heavy weapon around in a circle. He put all of his strength in the movement, and soon had a small spot cleared by the stone wall, and to this the boys fought their way, using their muskets as clubs, for there was no time now to reload.

"Fire at them again!" came the ominous cry from a British officer, and, to escape another volley, the minute boys scaled the stone wall. The shots, therefore, did little damage, and before the British could make another assault, the minute men in their rear came up, and they were forced to continue their inglorious retreat.

"Are you much hurt, Paul?" questioned Roger, eagerly, as soon as he could get to his chum's side.

"No, the bullet just clipped my forearm, that's all. Just bind it up with my handkerchief, will you, and I'll go on with you."

Roger did as requested, and then the attention of himself and the others was directed to Limner, who lay in the dust, groaning dismally.

"Let us carry him to the nearest farmhouse," said Andy, as soon as it was learned how seriously Limner was hurt. "He'll need a doctor's assistance, I'm afraid."

As tenderly as possible, Hen and two of the boys picked the lad up. They had scarcely moved onward a hundred paces than a wagon appeared, the seat occupied by a young farmer and Doctor Hardwaith.

"Here is another, Barton!" cried the doctor. "Hullo, a boy!" he added, as he leaped to the ground. "Bob Limner! Where is he shot?"

"In the thigh, doctor," answered Roger. "Will you care for him?"

"Certainly, — that is what I am out for with the wagon, — picking up all our wounded men. If this fighting keeps on, we'll soon have to establish a regular hospital corps," he went on.

In the bottom of the wagon, which was covered with straw and blankets, rested two other wounded patriots. Limner was placed between them, and then the wagon was turned towards a farmhouse which had been hastily transformed into a temporary hospital.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FOLLOWING UP THE ENEMY.

THE blood of the patriots was now thoroughly aroused, and realising that they were being reinforced constantly, and that they would fight to the bitter end, the British officers did their best to urge their men forward on the retreat.

"We must reach Charlestown ere it is too late," was the conclusion arrived at by them. They knew that if the patriots became strong enough in numbers to surround them, not a member of their body would escape alive.

The attack of the Americans had begun at a place called Merriam's Corners, where two British soldiers were killed, and it was continued as the redcoats approached Hardy's Hill. Of course the British returned the fire of the minute men, but as the latter kept themselves very largely behind stone walls and trees, their shots did but little damage. At a place called Brooks's tavern, where the road was through a dense woods, the minute men felt thoroughly at home, and so gall-

ing did their attacks become that Colonel Smith ordered out detachments as flank guards to dislodge the patriots.

The movements of the flank guards were disastrous in the extreme. Instead of being forced into the open, the minute men surrounded each British detachment, and but few of the redcoats escaped being shot. The minute men were becoming thicker every instant, and now their main body was joined by the soldiers from Lexington, who had been holding back to guard their own town. The Lexington men had been called cowards by some of the others, because they had not taken a more aggressive stand at the outset of hostilities, and now they pitched into the battle with a vigour that brought them many cheers from their friends and carried consternation into the ranks of the enemy.

"Give it to 'em; don't let a man of 'em get back to Boston to tell old Gage the story!" came the cry. "Remember the Stamp Tax and the Port Bill! Down with the redcoats!"

The British yelled but little. As they had come into the country without a drum-beat, so they went out, marching with all the swiftness at their command, their ranks broken, and every officer and man scanning each side of the roadway eagerly, ready to dodge the instant the barrel of a patriot's flintlock was pointed at him! It was, no doubt,

a trying and bitter time for all, but they had brought it upon themselves, and must take the consequences.

"If only the reinforcements would come up!" Such was the cry of more than one officer, as he went with his men in a very undignified fashion. To think that their well-trained and equipped troops should be driven along before a lot of raw, commonplace farmers! And it looked, too, as if their men might become panic-stricken at any moment, and surrender entirely!

But let us go back to Roger, and our other brave minute boys.

As soon as their wounded comrade was cared for, Roger called the others together.

"Now, fellows, I want to know if you feel like going on?" he asked. "I don't want any one to go that doesn't feel like it."

"I'm going, wound or no wound!" cried Paul.

"That little skirmish didn't scare me," said Dick.

"I'll fight 'em as long as I can stand," exclaimed Andy. "Hurrah for our side!"

"That's the talk!" came from the others.

"I'm glad to hear you say that," said Roger, smiling through the dust and perspiration on his flushed face. "Come on!" And away he went after the minute men, who were driving the red-coats before them.

"Hold on!" yelled Hen. "Air ye all loaded up?"

Some were, but the most were not. The latter sheepishly stopped to load, while Hen gave them a lecture, in his own peculiar way, on rushing into danger without being duly prepared to meet it.

"Wot's the good o' a gun ez ain't loaded?" he demanded. "Ye want tew load, an' load heavy, tew do them blasted Britishers enny harm. Nary a one of ye would think o' goin' on a bird hunt without bein' loaded, an' yit when it comes tew huntin' the biggest kind o' game, ye fergit all about yer gun, by gum!"

"We won't forget again, Hen," they answered, and, for the most part, they kept their word.

More minute men from the river beyond Concord were coming along, and the boys and Hen joined them. It was learned that Colonel Barrett, of the American forces, had resisted the destruction of the colony's property, and a heavy fire from both sides had resulted, with the loss of a dozen or more lives.

"Our men are coming in from all sides," said the minute man who gave Roger this news. "We have at least four hundred at hand now, and, by the time the British get back to Lexington, we'll have twice as many, especially if the troops from Salem and Marblehead arrive."

But the troops from Salem and Marblehead

never came,—at least, not until the struggles of which I am telling had become a part of our history. For not bringing them up in time, Colonel Pickering, who was at the head of the Salem troops, was roundly censured.

Pell-mell down the muddy and torn-up road went men and boys. It was not long before they came up to the main body of minute men, who had just fired at the retreating redcoats, and were stopping behind a convenient bend to reload. Some of the minute men had sought the shelter of stone walls and trees at the turn of the highway, and these went ahead, to harass the British troops with a sort of sharp-shooting fire, which was as dangerous as it was galling.

“Hi! Hi! The redcoats have turned!” Loud and unexpected rang the cry, and, in a trice, the minute men and boys found themselves confronted again. The Britishers were furious, and pressed onward with an intensity which looked as if it would carry everything before it.

“Christopher Columbus, but this is fighting!” cried Dick, as he and Roger came up, side by side. “These men are as brave as any of our own!”

“They are real soldiers,—not such rascally hangers-on as Sergeant Kegan and those scamps we met at our house,” answered Roger, as he drew back to catch his breath. “Drop down, Dick, quick!”

Dick dropped. At the same moment a shot rang out, and a bullet whizzed through the air directly over his body. Before Dick could realise how his chum had saved him, Roger's musket was to his shoulder. The blaze of the weapon was followed by a howl of pain, and a redcoat skulking along the stone wall was seen to pitch forward and clap a hand to his wounded arm.

"Roger, you saved me that time," gasped Dick, as he arose. "You winged him, too, didn't you? Good!"

There was no time to say more, for the tide of battle was sweeping onward, and they were carried into the midst of the fray, whether they would or not. It was shoot and club, load, advance, retreat, and grapple, until everybody on both sides was all but exhausted. Especially was this true of the British troops, who had had no rest since leaving their boats on the Charles River at Phipps's farm, many miles away.

"Let us wipe 'em out! Down with the oppressors!" Such was the rallying cry of the minute men, to which the redcoats would reply, "Down with the rebels! King George for ever!"

As the advancing and retreating continued, the boys gradually became separated in spite of themselves. Roger and Dick, however, continued to keep side by side, and faithful Hen never took his eyes from his young master, saving to protect him

from some skulking attack. Although he told no one, he had saved Roger twice from being shot in the back, in one case shooting a redcoat, and in the other knocking him flat with the butt of his musket.

Exhausted, and driven to desperation by the loss of so many men, the British soldiers now began to show signs of disorganisation, and a large number of them left the road, and took to the fields and woods beyond, feeling they would be safer there than in the narrow highway.

"They are scattering!" was the cry of the patriots. "Follow them, boys! Don't let a soul get back to Boston! We'll teach General Gage a lesson he won't forget!"

By this time the main body of the soldiers had passed the farm belonging to Dick Winthrop's father. A short distance further, many of the minute men came to a halt, and Dick glanced anxiously over to where his home was situated, in the midst of the growth of maple-trees.

"I hope mother and the others are safe," he said. "I've half a mind to run over and see."

"What's that smoke coming up from among the trees?" questioned Roger, as a black cloud rolled upward. "Oh, Dick, look!" he cried, as the smoke became thicker.

"The house is on fire!" gasped Dick. "Oh, the base rascals!"

He set off on a run for the homestead, with Roger at his side, and Hen in his usual place behind. Roger was as much concerned as his chum, for he knew Dick's only sister, Nellie, was in that house, and, though Roger had never confessed it to a soul, he thought Nellie Winthrop the best and prettiest girl in the whole world.

CHAPTER XIX.

FIGHTING THE FLAMES.

As the boys drew closer to the Winthrop homestead, they found that Dick was right. The cottage, a two and a half-storied structure, was on fire both in the front and the rear.

"Look at that!" ejaculated Dick, as he pointed to a bundle of dry straw which lay partly in the kitchen doorway, burning at a lively rate. "Would you think them mean enough to do it?"

"Some men are mean enough for anything," responded Roger, as he dashed in and pulled the burning pile into the yard. "I wonder where your folks are."

"Mother! Nellie! Johnny! Where are you?" yelled Dick; and, receiving no reply, he darted to the front of the house, where the black smoke was pouring from a parlour window.

In the meantime, Hen had rushed to the well, and now he came on with the tub of water which always stood handy for the farm dog and the

poultry. With a milk dipper, he commenced to throw the water in the kitchen wherever the straw had set the woodwork on fire.

"Oh, Roger Morse, where is Nellie?" It was the voice of Mrs. Winthrop, calling to the lad as she came running from among the trees, holding Dick's little brother by the hand.

"I don't know, I'm sure," exclaimed Roger. "Wasn't she with you?"

"Yes, but after the redcoats set fire to the place and ran away, she came back to see if she couldn't save the jewelry her grandmother left her. I didn't want her to come."

"It can't be that she's in the house," gasped Roger. "Nellie! Nellie Winthrop, where are you?" he yelled, at the top of his lungs. And then, as no answer came back, he went on, "I'll run up-stairs and see."

"Hold on; this smoke will suffocate ye!" cried Hen, and sprang forward to detain him; but before he could reach Roger, the lad was past him, and making for the hallway door.

Unfortunately, the door had been left open, so the hallway was as thick with smoke as the kitchen. But Roger knew the way, and, holding his breath and closing his eyes, he groped for the stairs, and mounted to the second story.

He felt he could hold his breath no longer, when the door to the front bedchamber was

gained. He tried the latch, only to find the door locked from within.

He gave a gasp that nearly strangled him, for the smoke was becoming thicker every instant. As he staggered, rather than walked, to another door, he heard the crackling of flames below, telling that the fire was gaining headway, in spite of Hen's and Dick's efforts to put it out.

The second door was unfastened, and Dick sprang into the room beyond, closing the door after him. The smoke had hardly penetrated the apartment, and the fresh air revived him. A steady curl of smoke, through several cracks, told him he was to hurry.

"Nellie! Nellie!" he cried, with all the strength at his command. No answer came back, but he fancied he detected a faint moan from the garret.

The stairway to the upper apartment was between the front and back bedchambers, and, finding it, Roger leaped upward, three steps at a time.

In the semi-gloom above, he could at first see nothing. He took several steps forward, and his foot came in contact with the dress of some one lying on the garret floor. He felt down. It was the form of Nellie Winthrop.

A shudder passed through him. Was the girl for whom he had so much regard dead? He

placed his ear to her breast. No, thank God! she still lived.

"Nellie! Nellie!" he whispered, as he picked her up. "What does this mean? What is the matter?"

For a moment she did not reply. Then her blue eyes opened and she gave a start.

"Who — what — let me go, you — you —"

"Don't be alarmed, Nellie, it is I, Roger Morse."

"Roger!" Instead of trying to release herself, she now clung to him. "Save me!"

"I will, Nellie. But what does this mean? How came you unconscious?"

"I ran up here to get a jewelry casket, hidden in one of the trunks. It was so dark, and I was so agitated, I ran into the chimney, and then I knew no more until just now. Have those red-coats gone?"

"Yes; but there is a worse danger. The house is on fire. Come, before it is too late."

"The house on fire! And you came up to save me? Roger!"

"Never mind that, Nellie. Quick, where is the casket?"

"In the trunk in the corner. It contains my grandmother's jewels, and some money father told me to put away just before he went off. But if there is not time to save them —"

"I'll get the casket," interrupted Roger. He felt around, found the trunk, forced back the lid, and in a moment more the rosewood box was in his possession.

But now the smoke was coming up the garret stairway, and Nellie began to cough violently. Roger ran down to the second floor, then came back, shutting the stair door after him.

"I think I could get through, but I doubt if you could stand it," he began.

"Then save yourself, Roger," she interrupted.

"What! Oh, Nellie, you surely think more of me than that?" he added, reproachfully.

"Yes, but, Roger, —"

"I won't go without you. I was thinking if we couldn't get out on the roof."

"Yes, there is a scuttle, over at that end. But what good will that do?"

"We can call to Dick and Hen to bring a ladder. Quick, show me where the scuttle is."

Nellie Winthrop did as requested, and he flung it open, letting a flood of sunshine into the musty garret. In a second he was out on the sloping shingles, and was assisting Nellie to follow. In fear and trembling the girl came out, and then both slid down to the gutter.

"Dick! Hen! We are on the roof!" sang out Roger, and soon those below put in an appearance.

"They'll be killed!" shrieked Mrs. Winthrop.
"Oh, what can we do for them?"

"Take the casket, Mrs. Winthrop," called out Roger, as he flung the box down into a bush.
"Dick, isn't there a ladder handy?"

"Yes, down at the barn, but it's not long enough to reach," was the alarming reply.

"You are sure it won't reach?" insisted Roger.

"Sure; it's too short by ten feet."

"Then throw us a rope, — a wash-line, or something."

"I hev an idee!" put in Hen. "Come on fer thet ladder, Dick. Roger, we'll be with ye in a minit. Keep up yer courage, both on ye!"

Off for the barn went Hen, running for once with a speed that was truly marvellous. He had the ladder out before Dick came, and both hurried to the house, as rapidly as the somewhat heavy object would permit.

"Plant it ag'in thet maple-tree," said Hen, and went up the ladder like a monkey. Once at the top, he pulled the ladder up to him, and the others now saw what he was up to. "Go on an' try tew put out thet fire!" he continued, to Dick and to the three men who had just come up.

The maple-tree grew within fifteen feet of the cottage, and, having reached a stout limb on a level with the gutter upon which Roger and the girl stood, the Vermonter planted the ladder

against the limb and allowed the outer end to drop forward. It struck the sloping roof of the cottage squarely, and thus formed a bridge from the roof to the tree.

But all this had taken time, and, thinking the fire might burst through the roof at any moment, Nellie Winthrop had grown exceedingly nervous, while her mother, in the yard below, had forgotten all about the casket of jewels and money, and stood wringing her hands in wild excitement.

"Be careful, Nellie!" she cried, hysterically. "Don't fall from the roof. Hold her, Roger, hold her!"

"She is safe with me!" shouted back the boy, who had a firm hold of the girl about her waist. "Nellie, do you think you can crawl to the tree?" he asked, as the ladder settled into place, and he tested it.

"Oh, Roger, it is so high!" she faltered. "I know I'll lose my hold and fall."

"Then let me carry you," he went on. "Close your eyes if you don't want to look, and keep perfectly quiet."

He caught her up in his strong arms, and placed a foot on the nearest rung of the ladder. In another moment he was walking towards the other end with his fair burden. Those below held their breath in suspense, but in less than ten seconds it was over, and the pair was safe in the tree. It

took but half a minute more to reach the ground, and then Nellie rushed into her mother's arms, and both began to sob.

Roger and Hen now turned their attention to the fire. Two more men had come up, a near neighbour, and a fellow known about the district as Deacon Marston. The latter was a short, stout, and exceedingly crabbed fellow, and on account of his strong Tory tendencies was but little liked by those who knew him. The neighbour went to work with a will, but Deacon Marston looked on with a disparaging look on his puffy face.

"You can't save that house," said he. "It's work thrown away."

"Accordin' tew your notions, most all work ez thrown away," puffed Hen, as he struggled up with two buckets of water from the well. "I calkerlate you air tew all-fired lazy tew help, b'gosh."

"Do you mean to insult me?" snapped Marston. "You — you overgrown country fool!"

"Call me er fule?" burst out Hen. "Take thet, and mebbe it will cool ye off!" and he dashed a dipperful of water straight into Marston's face, and down his neck. Marston wanted to retaliate, but Hen leaped into the burning kitchen, and the Tory was too afraid of losing his life to venture following.

The work of the men and the boys had an

appreciable effect on the fire, which had caught only where the woodwork in the kitchen and the parlour was exposed. The water, thrown in by the dipperful and the pail, soon extinguished the larger portion of the flames, and then Roger, Dick, and Hen went around with sopping bits of rag carpet and beat out what remained. In less than quarter of an hour after the rescue from the roof, the conflagration was a thing of the past, with no further damage than any carpenter and painter could repair in a few days.

Other men had come up and then gone, and now the neighbours hurried away, to join the minute men once more. Deacon Marston also departed, leaving the Winthrop family, Roger, and Hen alone.

All of the Winthrops were exceedingly grateful to Roger for what he had done, and they did not forget to thank Hen also for his work. Nellie came up, and, blushing as red as a peony, caught Roger by the arm.

"I owe you more than I can ever repay, Roger," she said.

"It's all right, Nellie," he answered, blushing, "why, I'd — I'd — do anything in the wide world for you," and then he turned away, feeling awfully queer, he could not tell exactly why. From that time on, both of the young people took a deeper interest in each other than ever before.

"Oh, mother," suddenly cried Dick, "did you take that casket Roger threw to you?"

"No; in my excitement I forgot it," answered Mrs. Winthrop. "I'll get it now," and she started for the bush into which the precious box had fallen.

A second later she uttered a cry of alarm, and not without cause. The casket was gone!

CHAPTER XX.

WHO STOLE THE ROSEWOOD BOX?

"It's gone!"

"Mother, you don't mean it?" gasped Dick, as he rushed to the spot, quickly followed by the others.

"Search for yourselves," groaned the woman. "It fell about there, did it not?" she asked of Roger.

"Yes."

"It ain't here," put in Hen, kicking aside some dead leaves. "Do you know wot I imagine? It war stolen!"

"Stolen!" came in a chorus.

"Exactly. Thar war several strangers stopped, an' one o' 'em more'n likely carried it off."

"But who?" questioned Roger.

"Thet's tew find out."

"I remember seeing two of the men near this bush," put in Nellie. "And that Deacon Marston was here, too."

"Marston ain't above stealin', tew my way

o' calkerlatin'," said the Vermonter. "He's a grumpy old Tory, tew!"

"What did the box contain?" asked Roger, with increasing interest.

"All of the jewelry my grandmother left me, worth at least forty or fifty pounds," said Nellie. "Besides, there was a bag of gold belonging to father."

"The bag contained forty pounds, too," put in Mrs. Winthrop. "Your father has been saving the money to pay off what was due on this land."

"Ninety pounds," commented Roger, mentioning a sum, as my readers know, equal to about four hundred and fifty dollars. "The thief, whoever he was, made a neat haul."

"I don't know much about this Marston," put in Dick, reflectively. "It may have been some of the other men."

"Who were the other men who were near the bush?"

"One of them was Mr. Slater, of Concord."

"Slater ez honest to the core," said Hen. "He wouldn't steal a crust o' bread ef he war dyin' fer it. I've knowed him nigh on to forty year."

"Mr. Slater would not take the box," put in Mrs. Winthrop. "But somebody has taken it, and we can ill afford to lose that money."

"And I don't want to lose grandmother's jewels," cried Nellie, with the tears streaming

down her pretty face. "They are heirlooms in our family," she added, turning to Roger.

"You shall have them back, if there is any such thing as getting them," the youth answered, earnestly. "Does anybody know the other man who was at the bush?"

Several shook their heads.

"He was a round-shouldered man, and walked like this," said Nellie, giving a clever imitation of the stranger's bearing.

"Oh, I know who you mean, — Yellow Sudder!" cried Hen. "He's from West Cambridge. Got a cobbler shop thar."

"Is he honest, do you think?" asked Mrs. Winthrop.

"He ought ter be, b'gosh," answered the Vermonter. "Why, they say he spends more time talkin' religion than he does mendin' butes."

"There goes the man, now!" exclaimed Roger, as he happened to look across a potato field back of the cottage.

"Stop him! He may know something!" ejaculated Dick, and he started after the cobbler, with Roger at his heels.

The man they were after was armed, and drew up his musket as they approached, but quickly lowered the weapon when he felt sure (he was very near-sighted) that they were friends.

"Mr. Sudder, won't you come back to the

house?" said Dick. "We want to ask you a few questions."

"What do you want to know?" asked the cobbler, quickly.

"Did you see anything of a square rosewood box that was thrown out into a bush?" put in Roger.

The cobbler scratched his head.

"Why, yes, I did."

"You did? Where is it?"

"I don't know where it is, I'm sure. I saw a man pick it up, and walk around the house with it. I thought he was going to give it to the lady of the place."

"Who was the man?"

The cobbler did not know the individual's name. But he gave a close description of the person, and walked back with the two boys to talk the matter over with the others.

"It was Marston, as sure as you're born," said Dick. "The question is, where did the rascal go?"

"Marston went in that direction," replied Hen, after some thought. "I'd trot arfter him ter onct, only I promised tew keep by Roger."

"I'll go with you," said the boy, quickly. He felt in some degree responsible for the loss of the casket. "Dick, I think you ought to stay around here, — at least, for awhile," he added to his chum.

So it was arranged, and Roger and Hen were soon on the trail of the stoutly built Tory. In the meantime, the firing of the British and the minute men had grown more and more distant, showing that the tide of battle, if such it might be called, was drifting to Lexington green again.

"I hope they don't serve our place as they did Winthrop's," observed Roger, as he and the hired man sped along the uneven footpath.

"Your mother an' sister will be a-gittin' narvous," said Hen, reflectively. "I dunno but wot we hed better scoot fer the homestead before very long."

On they went, over rocks and through brush, until they came to a neighbour's potato patch. They were just crossing this when Hen pulled Roger by the arm with great suddenness.

"Drap, boy, drap!" he whispered, and both went down flat on their breasts.

"What is it, Hen?"

"A lot o' redcoats on hosses. They war almost looking at us!"

The tramping of the animals could now be plainly heard, and soon the troopers went by, half a hundred strong, over the potato patch and on to a road leading to Lexington.

"Those chaps wuzn't in the fight afore," said Hen, his eyes flashing. "I'll wager a shillin' they air reinforcements sent on by General Gage."

The horseman had proceeded but a few hundred feet along the road when they suddenly came to a halt. Hen had arisen, and now, before he was aware of it, he was discovered, and three troopers came riding towards him.

"Crawl out o' sight, Roger," said the man, bent on saving his young master; and then, as the troopers came up, he aimed his musket at the nearest.

"Hi, there, don't shoot!" called the man aimed at.

"Then don't ye be fer comin' any nearer," answered Hen, grimly.

"We are three to one,—don't be foolish," continued the trooper. "We only want to ask you a question."

"Want ter ax a question, eh? Wot about?"

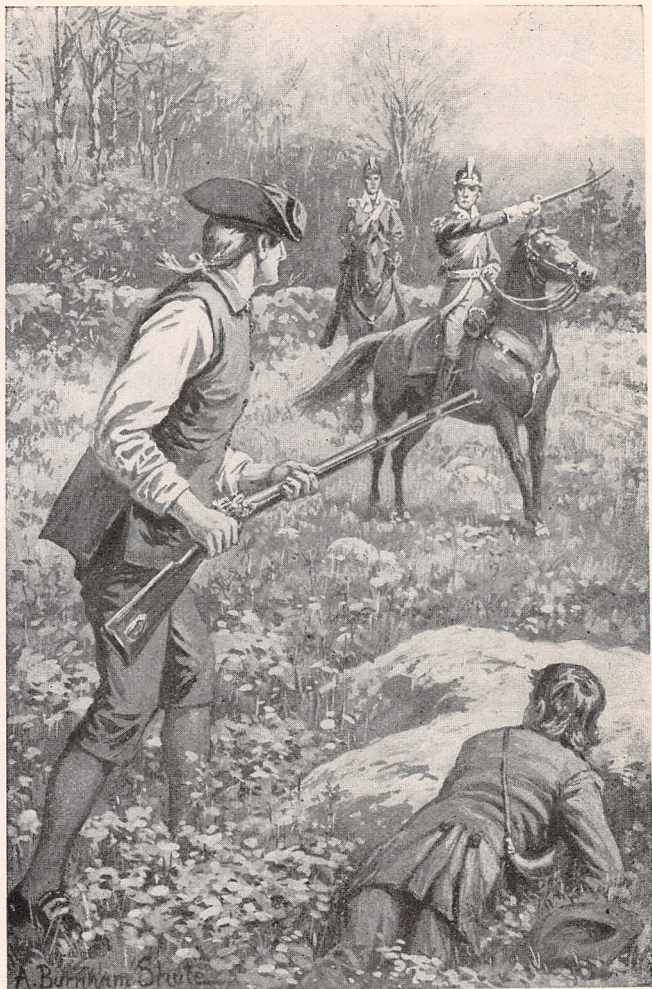
"Is that the direct road to Lexington?"

Hen's eyes twinkled. Here was a chance to help the minute men a good deal. He put on a look of surprise.

"The road tew Lexington!" he exclaimed. "O' course not. Thet's the road tew Lexington," and he pointed in the opposite direction.

"But the firing is over that way," said the trooper, suspiciously.

"Wall, thet road will take ye thar. It sweeps around in a circle, ye see. Thet road thar will take ye tew the brook."



“‘IS THAT THE DIRECT ROAD TO LEXINGTON?’”

"Oh, all right." The trooper spoke to his companions, then all wheeled about, and joined the others on the highway. Soon the entire body of troopers had faced about, and were galloping along as Hen had directed. As they departed, the tall Vermonter laughed, as he had never laughed before.

"Thet's the time I fooled 'em!" he cried. "Ef they keep on long enough, they'll fetch up in the most beautiful woods in these air parts; ain't thet so, Roger?"

"That's true, Hen," answered the boy, with a broad smile. "Won't their captain be mad when he finds out how he has been misled!"

The troopers had hardly disappeared, when Roger perceived the form of a man running rapidly along the edge of the woods.

"There is Marston, now!" he ejaculated. "And it looks to me as if he had seen us, and was trying to keep out of our way!"

"By gum! you air right, Roger. Come on, I calkerlate we kin give him a right good chase."

Away they went after the stout individual, who now redoubled his speed. The woods passed, Marston emerged upon a side-path leading up to what was known as Darry's Pool, a bit of marsh and water back of Lexington.

"It looks to me as if he had something under his coat," observed Roger, as they began to gradu-

ally overtake Marston. "I shouldn't wonder but what it's the casket."

"Halt, Marston, you infernal rascal!" roared Hen, bringing his musket up into position. "Halt, do you hear me?"

Marston heard, but he gave no sign excepting to leave the path, and take to the shelter of a line of brush and rock. This made the two pursuers more satisfied than ever that he was the guilty party, and they resolved to capture him at all hazard.

But now a new obstacle presented itself. The centre of Lexington was but a short distance away, and as Marston and his pursuers leaped into the field surrounding Darry's Pool, a company of British soldiers swept towards them, followed by an equal number of minute men and farmers, the latter armed with every weapon conceivable, from muskets and pistols down to pitchforks and clubs. Both sides had been fighting desperately, and in less time than it takes to tell it, Roger and Hen found themselves in the thickest of the fray.

"Where in the world have you been?" It was the voice of Andy, as he found himself beside Roger once more. "I've been looking for you for a good while. Ain't we chasing these red-coats in dandy shape, though?"

"I've been up to Winthrop's, — the house was

set on fire," answered Roger. There was no time to say more, — he found himself face to face with a British soldier who was on the point of aiming straight at his heart. As quick as a flash, Roger brought his own weapon up, and pulled the trigger. The crack and flash of the flint was followed by a loud report, and a yell of pain, and the red-coat fell back, wounded in the body.

"Thar's whar ye saved yer bacon, Roger," grinned Hen. "By gum! but things air hotter here nor they wuz up tew Concord."

"Both sides are becoming worn out," returned the boy, as, surrounded by friends, he stopped to reload and gain his breath. "But it does really look as if we were getting the best of them, doesn't it?" he added, in gratified tones.

"We air thet, Roger. If it wasn't so, they wouldn't retreat all the way from Concord to here, by gum!"

"Colonel Smith has sent to Boston for reinforcements," said a minute man standing by. "I understand he has sent for a big force, too."

"Well, we are being reinforced, too," said another. "Just see the backwoodsmen pouring in! This day's work will end British rule in these colonies!"

CHAPTER XXI.

A CALL FOR MORE POWDER.

To tell of all that happened within the next hour would be impossible. After it was all over, each patriot had his story to relate, and all were more or less interesting. As the British troops came within sight of Lexington once more, the fighting became sharper than ever, and it looked very much as if the enemy would go to pieces and be annihilated. The ammunition was running low, and many of the men were so exhausted by their march from Charlestown to Concord, and now part of the way back, that they could scarcely stand upon their feet.

"In the name of heaven, why doesn't General Gage send the reinforcements?" Colonel Smith is reported to have said, when bang! a musket-shot rang out, and he was severely wounded in the leg and pitched from his horse to the ground. He would have been killed had not some of his brave officers gathered around him and carried him off. Shortly after this another British officer was shot,

and his horse, a beast of great mettle, leaped a stone wall and landed upon the very man who had fired the shot, breaking his shoulder.

At last it was impossible for the officers to hold their men in check. The dead and dying were so numerous they could scarcely be carried along, and the only way the British officers could get their men to stand even for a minute was by rushing before them with drawn swords, and threatening them even as their enemies threatened them from behind and from both sides. "If the reinforcements do not come at once we are done for!" was the conclusion of their leaders.

General Gage had received the call for aid early in the forenoon, but it took some time to get a body of troops together to send to Colonel Smith's relief. Lord Percy was put in command of three regiments of infantry, two divisions of marines, and was also given two field-pieces. He marched out of Roxbury, so it is said, to the tune of Yankee Doodle, and with a show of arms which alarmed the people of that district more than anything they had yet seen or heard, for they knew nothing as yet of the occurrences at Lexington.

When the reinforcements for the British reached Cambridge, they found that the patriots had torn up a large part of the bridge over the river. To replace this took some time, and, meanwhile, the minute men kept gathering; word of

what had taken place at Lexington was received, and Lord Percy found himself marching through a territory which was as hostile as that through which Colonel Smith was now progressing. The patriots did not fight openly, but they harassed the reinforcements as much as possible, and succeeded in capturing a large load of provisions which had been taken along for those who were retreating from Concord. The attack on, and capture of, the provision wagon was led by a clergyman, the Reverend Doctor Payson! This will show how earnest and sincere were the patriots of those stirring times.

It was about two o'clock in the afternoon when Lord Percy's command came within sight of what was left of Colonel Smith's thoroughly disorganised troops. The two commands met on the outskirts of Lexington, and the newcomers immediately formed a hollow square, in which Colonel Smith's men were glad enough to seek temporary shelter. The men were so exhausted that even a British historian says "they were obliged to lie down for rest on the ground, their tongues hanging out of their mouths, like those of dogs after a chase." Of course, the minute men were also exhausted, but not nearly so much so, for most of them were hardy farmers, used to tramping around their fields and over the roads, and none of them had had the long march from Boston.

Lord Percy had been wise enough to send his two field-pieces to a small hill below Munroe's tavern, and these pieces now held the minute men in check ; and for a time after the reinforcements arrived, both sides rested on their arms, the newly arrived British officers to look over the situation and determine what was best to do next, and the minute men to reorganise and get their "second wind," as some expressed it.

"Wait till night, an' then ye'll see the fur fly," was heard on more than one side. Alas ! little did the minute men and their families dream of the many atrocities the shades of evening would bring forth !

The minute men now numbered probably a thousand, if not more. They had come in from all of the surrounding towns and villages. In the meantime, General Heath and Doctor (afterwards General) Warren had come on post-haste from Boston, and while the former assumed formal command of the half-organised patriots, the latter went among them with many words of advice and good cheer. Warren was universally liked, and his coming was hailed with delight by every minute man.

"Here is the doctor to take hold of the case," was the cry. "Remember, Warren, it's a case of kill or cure !"

"I'll remember, boys," was the smiling reply.

"I hope you have a good stock of pills on hand for the patient," meaning he hoped the patriots were well supplied with ball and powder.

As previously mentioned, the chief provision wagon of the British troops had been captured. It was thought at first by Lord Percy that this was merely delayed on the road, but when minute after minute flew by and it did not appear, a raid was made on the Lexington tavern and several nearby houses for food and drink, principally the latter. A number of others of the redcoats also sneaked off, as Patten and Yorston had done earlier in the day, to get their fill of good things as well as to steal whatever came readily to hand. But in justice to the British, it must be stated that these thieving expeditions were entirely unauthorised by the officers. Their simple raid for food was a necessity, and in many cases pay was offered for what was taken.

When the British reinforcements came up, Roger and his friends found themselves in a patch of woods some distance above the Lexington meeting-house. The firing now stopped, to a great extent, and the youth crouched down behind a clump of brush to see what the next movement of the enemy would be. To the right and the left of the lad, every tree, and every foot of the stone wall ahead, offered a hiding-place to one or more minute men.

Boom! It was a shot from one of Lord Percy's field-pieces. The cannon-ball had been aimed at the stone wall, and, the aim being true, a portion of the wall was shattered into a hundred pieces, severely wounding half a dozen of the patriots. Picking the wounded men up, the others fled to the safer protection of the trees.

"They are going to take it easy for awhile," said Roger, as he saw the English soldiers resting in the hollow square Lord Percy's detachment had formed. "I'll wager they wish they were safe back in Boston again."

"They'll be wuss whipped nor this afore they git back," said Hen.

"Roger Morse!" It was a cry from his left, and, looking over, the youth saw several men running towards him. "We are getting out of powder and shot!" said one. "Will you bring us some?"

"Certainly," answered Roger, glad of a chance to see how matters were going on at his home. "Hen, I think it will be best for you to go along."

"O' course," answered the hired man, who would not have left Roger's side even had he not been asked. "We might ez well hurry, tew, fer if them Britishers air goin' tew hev help, our men will want all the powder an' ball they kin lay hands tew, mark thet!"

The nearest route to the Morse homestead lay across a buckwheat field, where the tender sprigs of the last fall's sowing had been sadly trampled in a hundred places.

"Hev tew sow it over ag'in, I calkerlate," observed Hen, with a dubious shake of his head. "Thet's another score a-comin' in ag'in them pesky beef-eaters!"

The buckwheat field was passed, and they entered the orchard back of the homestead. They had just come into sight of the milk-house, where the powder was stored, when a loud cry for assistance made Roger's heart leap into his throat.

"It's Dorothy calling!" he gasped. "Hurry, Hen, or we may be too late!"

CHAPTER XXII.

URIAH BEDWELL MAKES A MOVE.

To go back a few hours.

After the departure of Roger, Hen, and the minute boys, neither Mrs. Morse nor Dorothy seemed to know what to do for awhile.

"If only Roger escapes uninjured!" sighed the fond mother, over and over again. "If they take his young life it will kill me!"

"Calm yourself, mother, dear," answered Dorothy, soothingly. "You had better lie down upstairs, and I will lock up below once more. We will take good care that no more of the redcoats get in."

As soon as her parent had consented to do as requested, and was as comfortable as circumstances would permit, Dorothy set to work to secure the lower floor of the homestead against further intruders. Every door and window was securely bolted or nailed, and in some instances the girl placed bits of boards over the openings, making everything as tight as was in her power.

Hen had left the muskets of the British soldiers lying in the sitting-room. She examined these, and such as were empty she loaded up. Then, hiding one of the muskets in a closet down-stairs, she took the others up to the bedchambers.

"Now let any enemy dare to come prowling around!" she murmured, and walked around, depositing a musket beside every window.

"What are you doing, Dorothy?" questioned the mother, from her resting-place.

"I'm preparing to defend the house," she made reply. "We are safe now, never fear."

As the fighting progressed in the neighbourhood of Concord, matters became quiet about Lexington, until every roadway about the Morse homestead was deserted. Going about from window to window, Dorothy saw that there was nothing to fear, at least for the present, and so slipped down to prepare an unusually late dinner, of which, however, her mother and herself partook sparingly, for neither had the heart to eat.

As the British troops came back to Lexington on their retreat, matters became livelier, and neither Dorothy nor her parent left the windows again.

"See, see, mother, the redcoats are running!" cried the girl. "Hurrah for our brave minute men!"

"Can you see anything of Roger?" was the

eager question of the sick woman. "My eyesight is not as strong as it used to be."

"No, I can't make out any faces yet. But see the redcoats run! Who would think our untrained men and boys could fight so well?"

"The Lord God of Hosts is on our side!" answered the mother, solemnly. "We fight the battle of the just!"

Suddenly the girl's face grew pale, and she clasped her hands in dismay. The redcoats had rallied, and they were sending the minute men pell-mell down the road and into the woods. A sharp fire was being kept up on both sides, and soon a cloud of smoke hid the greater part of the action from view. But at last she saw the minute men recover once more, and the hope in her heart returned.

"Hi, there, come down here, young woman!" The command came so suddenly, and the voice was so close, that Dorothy gave a start and a scream. Directly under the window stood Uriah Bedwell and several other men known to be of Tory proclivities.

"What do you want?" she asked, as soon as she could control her voice.

"I want to talk to you," went on Uriah Bedwell. "Come down without delay."

Had it been any other man of the district, Dorothy might have gone below, but she remem-

bered full well what Roger, in a few hasty words, had told concerning the Tory, so she shook her head.

"I can talk to you from here, Mr. Bedwell. What do you want?"

"Won't you come down?" he demanded, evidently much disappointed.

"No; I prefer to remain here."

"I'm not going to hurt you," sneered the Tory.

"I know how you treated my brother, sir."

"Oho!" Uriah Bedwell pursed up his thin lips and muttered something under his breath to his companions. "Where is your brother now?"

"Doing his duty, — as every patriotic colonist should be doing," she answered, meaningly and with spirit.

"Where is that hired man of yours?"

"He is fighting, too."

As soon as she had spoken, Dorothy realised that she had made a mistake. It was foolish to let these men know that she and her mother were in the house alone. She saw a smile of satisfaction pass from one Tory to another.

"Your brother and his companions have burnt down my house!" were Uriah Bedwell's next words, which caused both Dorothy and Mrs. Morse to cry out in amazement.

"Roger burnt your house!" said the mother. "Oh, no, Mr. Bedwell, he would never do that!"

"But he did do it, — he and some of these men who are resisting the laws of the King. But I'm not here to quarrel with you, widow, over what your headstrong son has done. I want to talk to you about another matter," continued the Tory, a foxy look stealing into his fishy gray eyes.

"What is that other matter?"

"Let us in, first. I don't want to stand out here and run the risk of being shot by these furious men who are running about."

"And if I let you in will you promise —"

"Don't let him in, mother, don't!" pleaded Dorothy, in a whisper. "He does not mean well, I can see it in his face!"

"Let me in, and I will promise not to lay my finger on either you or your daughter," said the Tory. "If you will give me a little aid now, I will promise not to make a charge against your son, when matters come up for a settlement," he continued, craftily.

The widow was undecided. She had lived a retired and simple life, and could not comprehend the utter baseness of a man like Uriah Bedwell. On the other hand, if the minute men were defeated, it might prove a great benefit to have such a friend as the Tory when General Gage should commence to prosecute the patriots in the name of King George III.

"It may be best to let him in," she whispered

to her daughter. "He says he will not harm us."

"I don't approve of it, mother."

"But he may cause Roger much trouble, Dorothy."

"I don't care, — I wouldn't trust him. He reminds me of a rattlesnake in a blackberry bush, ready to strike."

"Come, are you going to let me in?" demanded the Tory, impatiently.

"Tell me what you want, first," replied the widow, in a hesitating voice.

"To the Old Nick with her!" muttered one of the other men. "Woman, open the door at once, or we'll smash it in. We have no time to waste here."

"There, what did I say, mother!" cried Dorothy. "They mean us harm." She caught up the nearest musket. "Do you see this?" she called. "I want you to depart, every one of you!"

Uriah Bedwell staggered back at the sight of the gun, doing it so quickly he nearly upset one of his companions. A cry of anger arose from the Tories.

"Would you shoot us, woman?"

"Yes, I would, — if you dare to come nearer."

"Put away that musket, or we'll tear down the house on your heads!" yelled one of the men.

"Will you?" Dorothy aimed the weapon

directly at the Tory's head. "I am considered a pretty fair shot for a girl, and if you do not depart instantly, I'll pull the trigger!"

"She would murder us!" shrieked Uriah Bedwell, and both he and the other man ran for the shelter of several trees, the others following.

Here the girl and Mrs. Morse saw the Tories joined by several redcoats, one with his forehead bound up with a handkerchief. This latter soldier was the one who had been knocked senseless on the curb of Randolph Small's well. He had come to in time to learn that the military stores were to be removed to the Morse homestead, and, sneaking away, had joined his friends, and hunted up Uriah Bedwell and the others, in the hope of confiscating the powder as originally intended.

The new excitement was beginning to tell upon Mrs. Morse, and, feeling faint, she sank in a chair close at hand. Thinking her mother too exposed in this situation, Dorothy prudently drew her back into a corner and screened herself behind a big rocker, which dated to the days of the *May-flower*.

"Do not let them shoot you, child," moaned Mrs. Morse.

"I'll be careful, mother. They won't — there go two of them around to the other side of the house!"

Leaving the window, she ran to a side bed.

chamber, where another window overlooked the side in question. The men had their guns with them, and presently Dorothy heard a jingle of glass as they smashed in a dining-room window.

Nerved by what had taken place before, as well as by what she had seen of the fighting on the road, the brave girl resolved to hang back no longer. Throwing up the window, she leaned far out, took aim at those below, and fired.

"Oh, I am shot!" came in the voice of one of the Tories, and he fled to cover, limping painfully as he did so.

"Dorothy! Dorothy! did they hurt you?" shrieked Mrs. Morse.

"No, it was I did the shooting!" answered the daughter, as she flung down the smoking musket and caught up another.

"You! Did you hit any one?"

"Yes; struck that man in brown in the foot. I don't believe he'll bother us any more."

The second man had also retreated, and for several minutes neither Tories nor redcoats showed themselves.

"I'm afraid they are up to some trick —" began Dorothy, when a crash below started both. The would-be intruders had sneaked around to the front, and two well-aimed blows at the door had burst it from its hinges. In another moment the lower hallway was crowded with men.

"We will be murdered!" screamed Mrs. Morse.
"Oh, Dorothy, what shall we do?"

"Take a musket, mother. We can fight," was the quick reply, and a musket was placed in the invalid's thin hands. "Shoot the first one who tries to enter the room!"

"Say, men, come out here, — we've found the powder!" came from outside, in a loud and unexpected voice. "It's stored up in the milk-house!"

"You are sure, Gregory?"

"Yes; Noddings just unearthed it. Come, there is no time to lose."

"It's a pity you didn't find it before we broke in!" muttered the redcoat who had been shot in the foot. "Now I'm here, I would like to settle with that young woman who lamed me."

"There's no time for it. She — hark! she's calling for help, — and the minute men are coming back, too, as fast as they can! Somebody shut her up until we have the powder bagged!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE DEFENCE OF THE MILK-HOUSE.

ROGER had scarcely made the discovery that his sister was calling for assistance than Hen clutched him by the arm.

"See, the redcoats air at the milk-house," he cried. "They air arfter thet air powder, sure ez you air born! Consarn ye, take thet!"

Bang! went the Vermonter's musket, and a redcoat who had just emerged from the milk-house with a twenty-five-pound sack of powder on his shoulder pitched headlong in the brook, with the powder on top of him.

"Durn the luck, thet powder is gone," howled Hen, his face falling. "But I winged him, b'gosh," and he started to reload with all the rapidity at his command. The redcoat was badly wounded, but the cold water revived him, and he presently crawled out of the brook and to a resting-spot behind some bushes.

While this was going on, Roger was making for the house. Finding the back locked up, he ran

around to the front, to confront Uriah Bedwell in the hallway.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded, when another cry from above caused him to hurl Bedwell aside and jump up the stairs. The lamed soldier had gained the bedchamber, and he was abusing Dorothy and Mrs. Morse most shamefully.

"I'll fix ye!" he shrieked. "I'll serve ye out!" and flourished a dagger before them in such a desperate fashion that the hearts of both almost stopped beating, in terror.

Gentle reader, do not imagine that the picture I have presented is an overdrawn one. In these later days, it is almost impossible for one to imagine the brutality and fierceness with which the beginning of the War of the Revolution was waged. On that day and night when the child Liberty was born, deeds were committed which no pen could describe.

And let me add another word, lest some may think that an injustice is being done to England in these pages. The fight at this time was not between the patriots and the fair-minded people of our mother country. It was between the patriots and the hirelings of the base and crafty King George III., men who would stop at nothing so long as they could add to their power and wealth. Later on, when others came to the head

in England, the warfare was carried on in a far less barbarous fashion.

"You'll not do any cutting here!" exclaimed Roger, hotly, as he came up behind the redcoat and caught him over the arms. "Drop that dagger, or you are a dead man!"

"Roger!" burst from the lips of his mother and sister, simultaneously.

The dagger dropped to the floor, and the redcoat struggled desperately to free himself. But he was no match for the enraged youth, whose every nerve was at its utmost tension. With a whirl the rascal was carried out into the upper hall and sent crashing down the stairs, to fall in a heap on the spot Uriah Bedwell had vacated but a minute before.

"I'll give you ten seconds in which to get out of sight!" shouted Roger, picking up the musket he had dropped. "One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, —"

There was no need to count more. Groaning with pain, and cursing heavily under his breath, the redcoat gathered himself up and slunk out of the door, to lose no time in gaining the nearest shelter.

During the struggle up-stairs half a dozen shots had rung out in the vicinity of the milk-house. Roger was perplexed as to what to do. Should he go to the aid of Hen, or stay to guard his

mother and sister? A call from Dorothy decided the question.

"They are carrying off the powder, Roger! Go, help Hen and the others. I'll lock mother and myself in and stand guard with a gun."

"All right!" he shouted back, and in a second more was running towards the barn, which stood between the milk-house and the homestead.

"Minute men to the front!" Hen was yelling, at the top of his lungs. "Defend the beans!"—beans being the word used by the Sons of Liberty in speaking in public of hidden military stores.

Four men had already rushed forward at this cry, one of the number being Dick Winthrop's father. Mr. Winthrop was one of the best shots about Lexington, and, just as a redcoat aimed his gun at Hen's head, he took aim on the run and shot the fellow dead.

The death of one of their number gave a temporary check to the advance of the British and the Tories mingled with them, and this granted Mr. Winthrop, Hen, and the others time enough to reload. Hen's cry was productive of good results, for it was taken up on all sides, and in ten minutes over forty minute men and boys and backwoodsmen were gathered in the vicinity of the milk-house to defend the contents of the structure.

It was now beginning to grow dark under the trees, and all had to be careful, so that a friend

might not be shot instead of an enemy. The darkness drove the two forces closer together, and soon it was a hand-to-hand encounter on all sides. Andy and Paul had joined Roger, and the boys undertook the task of preventing the redcoats from crossing the brook, while the older patriots raised the rallying cry of "Clear 'em out! Make 'em take to the road!" thereby beating back the redcoats farther and farther from the orchard.

"I'll be glad when this day's fighting is over!" panted Andy. "I never did such hard work in my life! It seems to me as if I've run forward and back for fifty miles!"

"We must not give up until the redcoats run for Charlestown in earnest," answered Roger. "We must teach them a lesson they will never forget. If we — back there, you snake, back, or I'll fire!"

Roger had discerned a form creeping up from the other side of the brook. Now, as he cried out, the form arose and leaped the stream. The youth fired, but missed his aim. Soon another form appeared, and Andy and Paul fired together. The Tory was badly wounded, and slunk back, but soon two redcoats took his place, and then the three boys had as hot a time of it as ever before.

Back of the orchard was a narrow and seldom-used road running to Medford. The orchard was divided from this road by a rude stone wall which

had been placed there many years before by Roger's father. The trees grew close to the wall on the inner side, and outside was a long row of wild blackberry bushes.

As the fighting went on, Roger became somewhat separated from the other boys, and presently found himself beside the stone wall. What had become of Hen he did not know. The last of the redcoats to be beaten back had disappeared, and he was on the point of returning to the vicinity of the milk-house when a deep groan from the opposite side of the wall caused him to pause.

The groan was repeated, and, as the sound evidently came from a man in deep distress, he stepped closer, to look over the stone structure. He beheld a British lieutenant lying at the foot of the blackberry bushes, a bullet wound in his breast, from which the blood was flowing in a steady stream.

"Help me, for the love of heaven, help me!" groaned the sufferer; and seeing he was alone and unable to do any harm, Roger leaped the wall and knelt at his side. He saw at a glance that the British lieutenant was both handsome and well-bred, a gentleman in the true sense of the word, even if he was an enemy.

"What can I do for you?" asked Roger, kindly. He did not wish to remain in the vicinity when he might be needed elsewhere, and yet the

suffering of the man appealed strongly to his sympathies.

"I am dying! Can you — you get me a drink of water — or something?" was the faltering reply. "I am shot through the — the breast. Oh, the pain of it!"

"I'll get you some water," answered the boy, and, leaping the wall again, he rushed to the nearest point of the brook. He had a cup with him, and, filling this, soon returned to the wounded man's side.

"Thank you, young man, you are good even if you are a Yankee!" came in a gasp. The soldier drank but a few swallows, then motioned the cup aside. "Have — have our men retreated?" he went on, eagerly.

"They are on the retreat now, sir."

"Too bad! Then there is no one left to pick me up? What will become of me here!" and the British lieutenant gave another groan.

"How were you shot?"

"I was just climbing the wall, when a stray bullet from somewhere struck me. So our troops are retreating! Then the minute men have gained the day."

"We are trying to hold our own. We did not start the conflict."

"We — did you take part? Why, you are little more than a boy!"

"I have been with the men since early morning, sir."

"To Concord?"

"Yes, sir."

"I thought the minute men from all over must be gathering. They know how to fight, even though they do skulk behind the walls and trees."

"Your men would use the walls and trees, too, if they got the chance," answered the youth, quickly. "Remember, we are only farmers standing up against men who make a business of fighting."

The wounded man drew a deep sigh. "I won't dispute with you, lad, for it would be useless,—and I feel as if I were going to die. If I do die, may I ask a favour of you? You look honest, and I feel sure you will keep a promise if you make me one."

"What favour do you ask?"

"My name is Brascoe,—Lieutenant Alan Brascoe. I have a wife at Boston. If I die, will you see to it that she receives my watch and money, and also the private papers which are here in my breast pocket? The papers are of the most value, and I would rather leave them with an outsider than with some of my own men, for they might use them to my wife's loss. You can tell my wife how the papers were obtained, and she will be certain to reward you."

"I won't want any reward, sir," replied Roger, quickly. "I'll do as you wish,—if I can. But perhaps you are not going to die. Let me prop you up against the wall and see if I can't stop that bleeding."

"It will be useless ; I am growing weaker, — I feel it. Here, take the watch and money. The papers are here, the blood has already touched them. What is your name?"

"Roger Morse."

"Promise to get them to my wife, Morse ; will you?"

"I will do my best, sir,—if you die. But let me prop you up, as I said before, you may —"

He stopped short. A sudden change had come over the face of the wounded lieutenant. There was a shudder, and the man's eyes took on a glassy stare.

"I—I am going!" he gasped. "I—I can't see any more! Oh, that men should kill each other in this way! Boy, remember your promise, and tell my wife that I died as a soldier,—that I—oh!"

There was another shudder, and then the soldier's limbs began to straighten out. Roger caught his hand, but it was too late. The British officer fell back like a log.

Although Roger had beheld a number of deaths that day, no scene had affected him so strongly as



“HULLO! HERE IS ONE OF THE RASCALLY MINUTE MEN
ROBBING A DEAD OFFICER!”

this, and the tears rushed to his eyes as he gazed at the motionless form before him. What would that widow in Boston say when she heard the sad tidings?

"It is a shame that men should kill each other, even in battle," he murmured. "Pray God this cruel warfare may soon come to an end!" And so speaking, he started to take possession of the late lieutenant's belongings, as he had promised. He had just placed the packet of papers in his pocket, and held the watch and chain in his hands, when the quick footsteps of a dozen men on the road started him.

"Hullo! Here is one of the rascally minute men robbing a dead officer!" cried a harsh voice, and in a trice, before he could place the watch out of sight, Roger found himself surrounded.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ROGER BECOMES A PRISONER ONCE MORE.

THE redcoats who had come up were certainly a fine-looking body of men, tall, heavy-set, and earnest in manner, and in strong contrast to many of the other more or less brutal fellows Roger had previously encountered. They belonged to Lord Percy's reinforcements, and were consequently fresh and ready to do.

"The young villain!" cried the leader, who wore the marks of a second lieutenant. "This is a pretty business for anybody to be in! Robbing a dead enemy!"

"I was not robbing him," answered Roger.

"What are you doing with his watch, then?" put in another. "Hand that over to me."

"It belongs to this man's widow. He—"

"I'll waste no words with you," said the second lieutenant. "Pass over the watch. Who can this be? Neil, do you know?"

"It is Lieutenant Brascoe, of the Tenth Infantry."

"Poor fellow! Boy, did you shoot him?"

"No, sir."

"I do not know as I will take your word for it. Hand over that musket."

The command was so clear and sharp that Roger felt it would be useless to resist.

"Now your powder-horn."

"Lieutenant, supposing we take him along?" suggested the man called Neil.

"We might ; but he may give us trouble —"

"Never mind about that. If we take him along we may be able to exchange him for poor Filters, who was taken prisoner back of the tavern, and hurried away to goodness knows where."

"I'm afraid these minute men will kill off all of their prisoners," returned the second lieutenant, grimly. "Well, we'll take him along, if you wish it, men," he added, after a slight pause. "Keep him well between you. Come, boy, march along, and no lagging."

"Perhaps he can tell us the quickest route around to the main road," put in another of the redcoats.

"And lead us into an ambush, eh, Ulmen? No, we'll be our own guides for the present. Double-quick now, and if the boy lags there will be nothing left to do but to shoot him."

The last words were uttered for Roger's benefit. Whether the redcoats would really have carried out their threat Roger was not in a position to de-

termine. But he resolved to take no risk, and so moved forward, with the soldiers gathered around him in a close bunch.

The detachment of soldiers had moved along about a quarter of a mile when the second lieutenant suddenly called a halt.

"Hark!" he said, and all listened. A sharp firing came from beyond a patch of woodland to the south.

"Our troops are over in that direction," he went on. "We will take a short cut through the forest."

Roger could have told them that a passage through the woods would take them much longer than a walk around by way of the road. But as he had no desire to reach the main body of the enemy, he remained silent and allowed the detachment to plunge into the woodland, where the ground was uneven, full of sharp rocks and dangerous hollows.

"Hang such a place!" growled one of the men, presently. "I'm afraid we've missed it, lieutenant."

"We'll make the best of it, Ritzer," came with a short laugh. "This isn't quite as good as the streets of Boston, is it?" And then came a cry, as the lieutenant went down in a hollow and pitched forward on his hands, barking his knuckles in the act.

In the centre of the woods it was so dark the detachment could scarcely see three yards ahead. Roger thought this condition of affairs might help him to escape, and evidently the second lieutenant thought the same, for he turned to two of his men.

"Baldwin and Grimes, keep a strict watch on that boy," he said. "Now we have taken the trouble to bring him thus far it won't do to let him escape us."

"I am watching him," came from one of the soldiers addressed. "And I have my hand on the trigger of my gun, too," he added, suggestively.

In a moment after this, the party reached a brook, the same which flowed through the Morse farm. The descent to the brook was quite steep. Roger and his guards had dropped slightly in the rear, and now the boy put out his foot and tripped up one redcoat, while he shoved the other forward on his face. Down into the brook went both soldiers, with wild yells of alarm, while the young patriot turned about and ran for dear life.

"Stop him, he is running away!"

"Stop, boy, or we will shoot you!"

Bang! bang! bang! Three musket-shots rang out in rapid succession. Fortunately, however, none of the leaden messengers of death reached their mark, and Roger continued on his way, with

his heart beating violently and with the single purpose of putting distance between himself and his pursuers.

Had the boy escaped in an ordinary way it is doubtful if the detachment of redcoats would have come after him. But the fact that he had attacked and thrown two of their number angered the lieutenant in command, and he ordered the party to recapture the prisoner. On came the men with a rush, Baldwin and Grimes with them, ready to shoot at the first chance which offered.

A hundred feet of the rocky and treacherous way had been covered, and Roger was beginning to draw away from those behind, when suddenly his foot caught in a tree root and he was thrown violently upon his chest. As he went down, his head struck the side of a flat rock, and for a moment he lay stunned. Had the rock been sharp his brains must have been dashed out.

"He's down! Come on!" shouted the lieutenant, and before Roger could collect his scattered senses they were once more upon him.

"Shall I shoot him?" asked Baldwin, savagely. His face was badly scratched from his unexpected tumble, and he was in a fearful temper in consequence.

"Yes, go and shoot him!" roared Grimes, who was also suffering, and both guns were raised, ready to end Roger's youthful existence then and

there. The boy saw the movements, and gave himself up for lost.

"No, don't shoot!" commanded the lieutenant. "There is no use of murdering him in cold blood. We will give him another chance, — if he will take it. Boy, if we spare your life, will you promise to go with us?"

"What is his promise worth?" growled Baldwin.

"He looks honest, men. Come, what do you say, lad? Be quick, for there is no time to lose."

"Supposing I won't promise?"

"Then I'll let my men fire upon you."

Roger looked at the British officer and saw that he meant what he said. He had one chance for his life, the condition being that he would submit.

"Where do you want me to go?"

"To the main body of our troops. Quick, now, will you go?"

"Yes, sir."

"Will you swear to that?"

"I will."

"Be it so. Come along by my side. At the first sign of treachery, my men shall fire on you, and fire to kill. Forward, everybody!"

Again the detachment went on, with Roger by the lieutenant's side, and the men all around them. The boy could not blame the British officer in the least for the course he had taken, and he secretly

thanked God that his life had been spared. He noted that Baldwin and Grimes eyed him narrowly, ready to carry out the lieutenant's threat at the slightest provocation.

The brook crossed, there was still a hill to climb, where the stones were sharp and slippery. At last the party came to a spot which seemed to be impassable.

"We are stuck, evidently," muttered the lieutenant.

"You will find a better path to the right," said Roger. "It leads directly to the old Boston road."

"You are telling me the truth, boy?"

"Yes, sir. Why shouldn't I? I have promised to go along until your regular troops are reached, and I intend to keep my word."

"Very well; we'll try your advice. To the right, men, and we will let the boy guide us for awhile."

The trail Roger had mentioned was soon found, and two minutes later the highway was gained, and they came out in the open, half a mile below Lexington.

"Here we are at last," cried the lieutenant, and by the tone of his voice it could be noticed that a weight was lifted from his heart. "By the firing, I take it that the troops are just above yonder bend. We will go forward and see."

Again the men pressed on, their course presently taking them directly past the Morse homestead. But it was now too dark to see much, and Roger only noted that not a light was in sight about the house. He wondered if his mother and Dorothy were safe.

"You seem to be interested in something over yonder, lad?" said the lieutenant, sharply, as he noticed how Roger turned his head to look back.

"That is my home over there," he answered.

They were simple words, but they touched a responsive chord in the heart of the British lieutenant.

"Your home, eh?" he said, somewhat softly. "It's too bad I must take you from it, lad, but, you know, war is war, and we're hoping to trade you off later for one of our own men, who was captured a couple of hours ago."

"I'm not complaining, sir. I only hope my mother and sister are safe."

"Is your father fighting, too?"

"No, sir, my father is dead. There are only my mother, my sister, and myself, — and mother looks to me for everything."

Roger's voice sank with the latter words. The lieutenant drew a long breath, and cleared his voice with a loud ahem.

"Head of the family, — and only a boy. That's worse luck, — for you. If it wasn't for what has

happened, and that it would be contrary to the rules of war, I would let you go, upon my word, I would. But a soldier must do his duty, and — Here are our troops at last!”

The British officer brought his words to an abrupt close, for a sharp volley of musketry had rung out up the road, and an instant later a body of tall grenadiers hove into sight, the advance-guard of the retreating troops of the King.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE RETREAT FROM LEXINGTON.

COUNTING the men who had left Boston the evening before, and his own troops, Lord Percy now had sixteen hundred soldiers under his command, the vast majority of whom were well equipped for fighting. Those who had been pursued from Concord had been given food and drink and a chance to rest themselves, while hostilities were suspended for nearly two hours, and now they felt once more able to fight, should occasion require. Indeed, now that they were reinforced, they were anxious to fight, in an endeavour to retrieve their inglorious fortunes.

But though thus situated, Lord Percy had no desire to continue the contest. He had been sent out to bring the first body of troops back to Boston in safety, and he felt that to do battle, so far as an attack went, would be going beyond his orders, and there was no telling how such an attack might end. It was true the minute men were badly equipped and hardly organised, but

they had shown a daring and a persistence to conquer which was as astonishing as it was effective. In addition to this, the numbers of the enemy were constantly increasing. At present there were not over a thousand; by night there might be twice that number, and the retreat to Charlestown might be cut off.

So, as soon as he felt that the tired soldiers had had a sufficient rest, he ordered the field-pieces to vacate the hill near Munroe's tavern, and commenced other preparations for an orderly but hasty departure down the old Boston road.

The minute men, from their places of concealment, watched these preparations with interest. By the advice of their leaders, they had not attempted an attack while the hollow square was being formed and the tired soldiers cared for. They were short of ammunition, and there was no telling but what Lord Percy would swoop down upon them and endeavour, with his fresh troops, to "round them up," and cut them off from their friends.

Now, however, as soon as the first detachment of British soldiers marched off towards Boston, a yell went up from the patriots. The enemy had given up all idea of attacking them again. They were beaten. The yell was followed by a fierce volley of musketry, a volley which brought down several of the newly arrived soldiers, who, up to

this time, had not fired a shot in or about Lexington.

This galling volley caused Lord Percy to change his tactics. He had hoped to retreat as quietly as possible. Now he commanded his officers to "keep the road clear at any cost," and that meant to fire in return. A few minutes later the battle was again on, and the British troops were hurrying for Charlestown as rapidly as the situation would permit, carrying with them, in wagons and carts and on stretchers, over a hundred and fifty men, wounded and dying.

It was this flying body of men which Roger and his captors met at the turn of the road below Lexington. All were soon in the midst of the red-coats, and many were the glances of surprise shot at the young patriot.

"Hullo, there's a great capture!" cried a captain of grenadiers. "What are you going to do with the boy, lieutenant?"

"Trade him for one of our men, if we ever get the chance," was the reply. "Have we any other prisoners?"

"Yes, six in the third wagon. But they are all men."

"This one will count for a man, too, later on. If we can't exchange him right away, we'll put him in prison and let him grow," put in Baldwin, with a coarse snicker, and a general laugh followed.

The third wagon soon came along, and Roger was dumped into it, his hands being first bound tightly behind him. On the floor of the wagon lay the six prisoners already alluded to, side by side, and as there was no room on the flooring of the turnout, Roger was ordered to lie down directly on top of the six.

"And don't you try to get up, unless you want to be shot," said the guard, who rode in the rear.

"Are you going to take me to Boston?" queried Roger.

"Shut up! We are not answering questions just now!"

Scarcely had he spoken than a musket-shot rang out close by, and the guard toppled back, struck in the left arm. Some soldiers directly behind caught him and carried him to an ambulance wagon, and another guard took the wounded man's place.

The course of the British troops was onward to West Cambridge, but as the minute men increased, the progress became slower and slower, and stops were frequent. Of the patriots, many dropped out, but there were always fresh arrivals to take their places, and the firing was kept up incessantly.

All of the prisoners in the wagon, but one, were strangers to Roger. They were militia men, and wore tattered and faded uniforms which had most

likely done service in the French war, or in a conflict with the Indians. The prisoner Roger knew was a wheelwright from Acton, who had been captured while trying to cross the road directly in front of a body of marines. He had stumbled and fallen, and three of the enemy, pouncing upon him, had deprived him of his wind. His face was partly covered with blood, for he had received a severe kick in the cheek during the scuffle which followed.

"Well, Morse, we're in the same boat, I see," he whispered, when the guard was not paying particular attention.

"Yes, Traverly, we are; and I wish I was out of it."

"Reckon we all wish thet," put in another of the prisoners. "I don't calkerlate bein' put into a Boston prison will be very pleasant."

"I wonder if we can't make a break for liberty?" suggested another fellow, the largest and most powerful fellow in the wagon. "If my hands were loose I wouldn't stay here ten seconds," he went on, in a mere whisper. "Can't one of you unfasten that rope, and I'll —"

"Silence in there!" came from the guard, and the muzzle of a musket was thrust downward to where the prisoners lay. "No plotting to get away, now, or it will be the worse for you."

"I ain't plotting to get away, I'm plotting to

lay a bit more comfortably," whined a prisoner who had not yet spoken. "I'm a sick man, and I didn't take no part in this affair. I was just walkin' across my wheat field when four soldiers collared me and brought me here."

"No fairy stories to me!" came the harsh return. "I suppose when you come up for trial every soul of you will be as innocent as a new-born lamb. But it won't go. Them as dances have to pay the fiddler, and the score will be a heavy one for this day's work. If I had my way I would make all of you walk, with a gun muzzle to your ears, and let some of our tired-out fellows do the riding."

By this time another bend in the road had been reached, and the wagon was compelled to halt. To the left was a fringe of woods, and to the right, a rocky field, fronted by a fairly high stone wall. Both the woods and the stone wall screened a large number of minute men and colonial militia, and a hot fire was poured into the advancing redcoats.

The guard's attention having been drawn away, Roger felt the hands of the man below him at his wrists, untying the rope which held him prisoner. In less than a minute the boy was free.

"I'll turn over on my breast, and you can do as much for me," came in a whisper. "Don't try to escape yet."

Softly the man turned over, bringing his crossed wrists directly up to where Roger's hands still lay motionless. The youth immediately set to work as directed. The rope was strong, and the knots tough, but he persevered, and soon the man was also free. He had a knife in his pocket, and, watching his chance, he cut the bonds of the man next to him, and passed the knife on. In less than three minutes all of the prisoners were free, so far as their bonds went.

But now the guard became suspicious, and leaned forward in the gathering darkness. "What are you up to, down there?" he questioned, pointing the muzzle of his musket directly into Roger's face.

Instead of answering, the youth leaped up, and knocked the gun to one side. Like a flash, every prisoner was on his feet, realising that the time for action had arrived. While several sprang at the guard, others caught hold of the driver of the turnout, and hurled him to the road.

"Turn the horses into the woods!" came the cry from the wheelwright. "Give 'em the whip! Quick, now!"

The order was obeyed, and as the heavy wagon swung around, the guard was pushed off, to fall on top of the driver, both cursing roundly at their ill luck. Then came a volley from the redcoats directly behind the wagon, and one of the late

prisoners threw up his arms and toppled over the horses, — dead.

The confusion, and a savage cut from the whip, along with the falling of the body over them, caused the frightened horses, already highly nervous on account of the firing, to plunge forward at an increased rate of speed, over some low brush, and directly into the woods between a number of tall trees. They could, of course, not go far, and, fifty feet farther on, the wagon was wrecked against a heavy elm, and one of the animals went down, breaking his leg.

The force of the collision threw Roger into the air. As he went sailing along, he clutched a number of tree branches, and this saved him a serious fall to earth. In a moment more he was upon the ground, and much relieved to find himself among friends.

“Thank heaven, I am out of that!” murmured the boy, to those standing near.

“Was ye a prisoner?” asked a minute man, who was busy loading his musket.

“Yes, I and six men.”

“That is John Barstow’s wagon. Reckon they stole it. The horse with the broken leg is done for, too. Well, we’ve given ’em a good drubbin’, ain’t we?” and the minute man rushed again to the front.

Being without a weapon, Roger could not con-

tinue in the fight, even had he been so inclined. But the exertions of the day were beginning to tell upon him, and, moreover, he was anxious to know how matters were progressing in the orchard, around the milk-house.

"Who knows but what the enemy have captured that powder, after all," he thought, and set off on the return without delay.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE MEETING IN THE WOODS.

As Roger hurried along, as fast as his tired limbs would permit, he felt in his pocket to learn if the packet the dead British lieutenant had given him was safe. It was still where he had placed it, and now, to make sure that it would not slip out and become lost, he pinned the pocket shut.

It would have been foolhardy to have risked his life in the neighbourhood of the highway, where a desultory firing was being kept up for the distance of half a mile at one time. He struck directly into the woods, over rocks and small brush, until, quarter of an hour later, he reached an old trail, which led, in a roundabout course, to the confines of the homestead farm.

Roger was both hungry and thirsty, having had scarcely a mouthful since early morning. Coming to the brook again, he procured a drink, and at the same time made up his mind to get something to satisfy the cravings of his stomach, as soon as the house could be reached.

The trail, under the trees and down in a hollow, was gloomy and uncertain, and he moved along with caution, for fear of a nasty tumble or another surprise by the enemy. The sound of distant firing in the direction of his home told him that the conflict was not yet at an end around the place.

A half mile had been covered, and he was moving along with increased confidence, when a crashing in the brush ahead brought him to an abrupt halt. He listened intently, but the crashing ceased almost immediately.

What was it he had heard? Eagerly he asked himself the question. Was it man or beast, friend or foe?

Roger knew that there were no large wild animals in that woods, although rabbits and squirrels abounded, with a fairly good number of foxes, and an occasional wolf. At the thought of the latter beast, he shuddered, for he had not forgotten the thrilling encounter of the day previous.

A painful minute or two passed, and still the silence continued. Yet Roger did not dare to move, for fear of an attack. Earnestly he wished that he had his musket, but that weapon was down by the stone wall, close to the body of the dead British lieutenant.

Presently he detected a slight movement ahead, so soft it could scarcely be heard. He bent his

ear and heard some one, or something, withdrawing from the vicinity by a route to the left of him. Curious to learn from whence the sounds proceeded, he tiptoed his way in the direction, taking care that no cracking twig should betray him, and standing ready to flee should the situation become too dangerous.

"Oh!" It was a half exclamation, half grunt, which reached his ears, coming from behind a clump of trees directly before him. The speaker, a man, had stepped into the hole of some wild animal, and pitched headlong. As the man hastened to pick himself up, Roger recognised Deacon Marston.

"Deacon Marston!" he cried, and came into full view.

"Why—er—Roger Morse!" stammered the man. His wind had been partly knocked out of him, and he could scarcely speak. "Who—er—where did you come from?"

"I just came over from the road. Where are you going?"

"I—I am trying to make my way to West Cambridge, to the house of my daughter," was the hesitating reply. "Oh, but this is a fearful day for us all! The colonies will suffer dearly for it!"

"And England will suffer, too. But, Marston, why didn't you stop when Hen and I called to

you, over at Darry's Pool?" went on the young patriot.

"Did you call to me, over to Darry's Pool?" questioned the man, in well-pretended astonishment.

"Of course we did, — and you know it."

"Upon my honour, I didn't, Morse. Why, I — I thought the redcoats were after me. The — the fighting mixed me up so that my head was in a perfect whirl."

"I wanted to ask you a few questions."

"Questions? What about?"

"You were up to the Winthrop house when the fire took place, and we were of the opinion that you walked off with a rosewood box that I threw into a bush."

"I walked off with a rosewood box!" ejaculated Marston, with mouth and eyes wide open. "Preposterous! Do you — er — take me for a thief?"

"Never mind what we take you for. What is that sticking out under your coat?"

As Roger spoke, he pointed to a large bulge under Marston's left arm. The bulge was sharply defined, and the young patriot calculated that it was just about the size of a bulge the rosewood box might make.

"That? Oh, that's a — er — a lunch-box I brought along, for there is no telling where or when a man can get a meal now."

Roger felt that Marston was not telling the

truth. Yet what should he do? The man was powerful, and, moreover, he carried a pistol in a belt about his waist.

A bright idea struck him. "It was a happy thought to get the lunch-box filled," he said.

"I reckon it was, — but it cost me two shillings," answered Marston.

"I am very hungry myself. Won't you spare me something? Even if it is only a bit of bread," went on Roger.

At this, the face of the man fell. He felt that he was caught in a trap. He shifted uneasily from one foot to the other.

"Humph! I haven't got much of a lunch left," he muttered. "I'll want every mouthful of it for myself. As it is, I had to divide up with a soldier about an hour ago."

"Was it a minute man?"

"No, one of the King's troops."

"I wouldn't have given him a mouthful. If they — oh, Marston, what is that in the tree over your head?"

At this change of subject, purposely made by Roger, the man threw up his head, to catch sight of the object to which the young patriot had drawn his attention. As he made the movement, the youth took a hasty step forward, thrust his hand under the fellow's coat, and brought out — the rosewood box!

"Hi! hi! Give me back that box!" roared Marston, realising that he had been badly duped. "Give it back, I say!"

"I knew you were lying to me, Marston," returned Roger, sternly. "This is a pretty business for a man who pretends to be a deacon to be in."

"I don't want to hear any of your talk, boy," growled Marston, growing first red and then white, as shame and alarm filled his mind. "Are you going to give it back?"

"Why should I? It belongs to the Winthrops. You ought to be arrested for this."

With a roar of rage Marston flung himself upon Roger, and ere the youth could disengage himself, both went to the ground, and rolled over and over into a nearby hollow. The man was thoroughly aroused, and soon he had the young patriot by the throat.

"I'm going to have that box, and, what is more, I'm going to make you promise not to say anything about it to any one," hissed Marston. "Will you promise, or will you take the consequences?"

"I'll promise nothing!" gasped Roger, hardly able to speak. "Let — let go of my throat."

"Never, — not until you promise. Do you suppose I'm going to let you go, to prattle to the whole neighbourhood about my doings, and get me into trouble? Why, I'd rather shoot you

first. I have a perfect right to do it. You are a rebel, and I am on the side of the King."

"You are not fighting fair, and to shoot me would be murder," Roger managed to say. He had squirmed loose from Marston's clutch, and now he was trying to turn over, to throw his assailant off. The rosewood box was lying among the dead leaves some distance away, and, during the struggle on the ground, both had been trying to obtain the pistol in the Tory's belt.

At last, Marston had his hand on the handle of the weapon, and, with a violent wrench, it came away from Roger's grasp. The next instant the muzzle was thrust into the young patriot's face, and the Tory pulled the trigger.

Had the weapon gone off it is more than likely that the life of our young hero would have been ended on the spot. But as Marston brought his forefinger to bear on the somewhat clumsy trigger, Roger flung up his hand, and his thumb caught between the hammer and the flint of the pistol. Down came the hammer, cutting into the flesh, and Marston's villainous design was frustrated. Ere the rascal could recover from his chagrin, Roger had the pistol away from him and was struggling to his feet.

To say that Marston was enraged would be to put the truth in its mildest form. He was in a perfect fury of both rage and disappointment. A

hasty glance into the rosewood box had given him an idea of its value, and to think that now, after he had taken such pains to secure it without any one being the wiser, he was to be outwitted by a boy, and by a hated rebel at that, was more than he could endure. Heedless of the fact that Roger held the pistol, he ran forward to where the casket lay.

"Drop that, Marston!" commanded the youth. He had disengaged his bleeding thumb, and readjusted the flint on the pistol. "Drop it, or I'll do a bit of shooting."

"No, no, don't shoot!" came in reply, and now the man's voice actually trembled, for, like most people of a lax conscience, he was a coward at heart.

"Then drop the box."

"But, Morse, pray listen to me. I—I wasn't going to steal the box, you know."

"I have my own opinion about that."

"The—er—box is very valuable, I believe."

"Yes; too valuable for you to handle."

"And how do I know that you will return it to the Winthrops?"

"You can go over to the Winthrops' house in a day or two and find out," answered Roger, grimly, satisfied that Marston would not go within a mile of the place, if it could be avoided.

"Maybe I will,—unless you and I—that is—

we might make a nice thing out of this between us, my boy. We could do it, and nobody would be the wiser."

"Indeed!" murmured Roger, sarcastically; but his sarcasm was lost upon such a thick-skinned fellow as Barnaby Marston.

"Yes, — a very nice thing. The box contains money and jewels. Now, supposing I let you have the money, and I took the jewels, what would you say to that? You can hide the money until this affair has blown over, and just think of what you'll have, — a hundred pounds or so clear!"

"You — you miserable scoundrel, that's what I say!" ejaculated Roger, the honest blood surging to his face. "Do you imagine every one is a thief like yourself? I've a good mind to shoot you for suggesting the thing! To divide such ill-gotten gains indeed!" And he made such a threatening move, that Marston fell back in terror.

He was about to step forward to secure the rosewood box, when a tramping, close at hand, startled both man and boy. Without warning, a detachment of seven British soldiers burst in upon the scene, on their way from the back road to the highway. The soldiers came to a halt and stared at the pair in amazement.

"What's the meaning of this? Who are you?" demanded the leader of the detachment.

“Secure him! He is a rebel, and he is trying to steal my money-box!” roared Marston. “Don’t let him rob me, gentlemen, I pray you, don’t let him rob me!”

CHAPTER XXVII.

MORE ADVENTURES IN THE WOODS.

AT the announcement so unexpectedly made by Marston, the British soldiers were very much surprised, for they saw that he was a large and powerful man, while Roger was but a boy. Then, however, they noted that the young patriot held a pistol, while Marston was unarmed, and came to the conclusion that the youth was in the act of "holding up" his intended victim.

As for Roger, he was dumfounded for the moment, and could neither move nor speak. Here he stood accused of a crime, when his single thought had been to bring a thief to terms, and restore the property which had been taken.

"He doesn't tell the truth!" he began, and started to pick up the box, when Marston placed his foot upon it. At the same moment three of the soldiers moved forward with the intention of making the youth a prisoner.

But Roger had had his fill of captivity, so to speak, and he had no intention of submitting to

another dose, which might not end so happily. As the soldiers advanced, he leaped back, and then, turning, darted away among the trees at the top of his speed.

"Stop him! stop him!" he heard one of the soldiers cry, and several began the pursuit; but Roger had a fair start, and to catch him was consequently no easy matter. On and on he went, over a slight hill and then down into a hollow. Here it was very dark, and he went headlong in a mass of dead leaves and brush.

As he went down he gave himself up for lost, for a musket-shot rang out, the bullet whistling through the air directly over his head. Then, as no one appeared immediately after, he wormed his way under the leaves, which were several feet deep, and lay quiet.

"Where did he go, Howard?" he heard a voice call out on the edge of the hollow.

"I think he came down here," was the answer. "But I can't see anything of him, it's so confoundedly dark."

"Well, he didn't get that man's box, that is one satisfaction," said the first redcoat. "What do you say if we light a firebrand and see if he is hiding down here?"

"What's the use? A firebrand may bring some of those minute men down upon us. The orchard below here was full of them, remember. I move

we go on. We do not want to run any risk of being cut off from the main body of our troops."

"No! no! We'll go on. We've saved that fellow's box for him, and he ought to be thankful for that. We'll get out of the woods just as quickly as we can." And thus speaking, the soldiers moved away.

Roger heard them depart with a great load lifted from his heart. He did not attempt to move from his hiding-place for fully five minutes after, and then arose with extreme caution, and with his finger on the trigger of the pistol, which, fortunately, he had retained in his possession.

"That is the time Marston got the best of me," he muttered, as he slowly left the hollow. "I wonder if I will meet that rascal again, or if there is any hope of recovering that box."

He was soon at the spot where the encounter with the Tory had occurred. It was deserted, and only a dent in the soft earth showed where the casket had lain.

"I suppose he went along with the soldiers, like lots of the other Tories are doing," reasoned the young patriot, but for once he was mistaken. Deacon Marston had no intention of leaving the vicinity until nightfall, or until the fighting should be over. To travel around when there was a prospect of being shot filled him with terror, and it was this fear which had caused him to take to the woods.

Finding it would be useless to remain longer in the neighbourhood, Roger continued on his way towards home, taking the shortest possible cut the nature of the ground would permit. As before mentioned, he was almost exhausted, and more than once he had to stop for a moment to rest.

As he progressed, the firing along the old Boston road became more and more distant, showing that Lord Percy's troops were pushing forward on their retreat as rapidly as possible. Coming to the top of a small hill, he saw the flare of a conflagration in the distance, proving that the redcoats had begun to apply the torch in their rage at being so defeated and harassed by the minute men.

"If this keeps on there will be an awful slaughter in and around West Cambridge," he muttered, as he left the hill, and his thought proved true, as we shall learn later.

The eastern end of the Morse orchard was now in sight, when, from the other side of the stone wall which divided the orchard from the woods, the young patriot heard a loud shouting, followed by the crack of several muskets. The redcoats and Tories had been driven from the place, only to return, half an hour later, in increased numbers, determined, if such a thing were possible, to obtain the powder stored in the milk-house.

Not to be surprised by the enemy, Roger crouched

down by the wall and waited. Soon there came a rush but a few yards away, and he heard the voices of Mr. Winthrop, Mr. Darly, and Paul and Andy mingled with a number of others. He waited no longer, but hopped over the wall, and a second later was among his friends.

"Roger! We have been looking all over for you!" cried Paul. "We were afraid you had either been captured or shot."

"I was captured, and they carried me right into the British columns," answered Roger. "But all of the prisoners in our crowd got away in a bunch. My! but I'm most beat out!"

"Don't say a word; I feel as if my feet were walked off," put in Andy. "Where is your gun, and where did you raise that pistol?"

"Took the pistol from old Deacon Marston," and Roger related the particulars. "My gun is down by the back wall. Do you think it would be safe for me to go after it?"

"I think so," said Paul. "I'll go with you."

"And so will I," answered Andy, and several others of the minute boys who had come up said the same.

"You boys take good care of yourselves!" shouted back Mr. Winthrop, who, with several other men, had gone forward, in the direction of the Boston road. "It's growing pretty dark, and you don't want to get into any more trouble than

you can help. I don't know but what all of you have done enough for one day."

"I sha'n't give up until the rest do," said Dick. "Oh, but I wish you had got that rosewood box from Marston," he added, to Roger, as the boys started for the back wall.

"So do I, Dick. I did the best I could, but when those redcoats came up —"

"Oh, I know you couldn't do anything against them, Roger. I only hope some of us meet Marston again, and with that box. If I meet him, I'll promise to make it warm for him!"

"We'll all promise that!" said Andy, and this caused a short laugh, for none of the boys had ever liked Marston, who was a sanctimonious hypocrite.

"Where is Hen?" was Roger's next question, for he was anxious to know if the hired man was safe.

"The last I saw of him he was chasing two redcoats along the brook," said Dick. "The fellows were evidently out of ammunition, and they were legging it as if they were racing for a prize."

It did not take the boys long to reach the spot where the death of the British lieutenant had occurred. To Roger's amazement the soldier's body was gone.

"Hullo, I wonder who removed it?" he cried.

"I saw a wagon go through about an hour ago," said Paul. "Perhaps that picked him up."

"He was a good man, — I feel certain of that," added Roger, soberly. "It's a shame such men should be killed off, no matter what side they belong on."

"That's true, Roger," said Andy. "Just think of it, old Munroe is dead, and there never was a better man to carry a flag." Andy referred to Robert Munroe, of Captain Parker's company, who in years gone by had carried his company's colours at Louisburg, when that stronghold was taken from the French by the English and American forces. Even some of the old English veterans regretted the death of Munroe at that one-sided conflict at Lexington.

Roger found his gun just where he had dropped it, and, after seeing to it that the weapon was ready for use, he placed the pistol taken from Marston in his pocket. The boys had just started to move in the direction of the milk-house, when a call caused Roger to cry to them to halt.

"It is Hen!" he exclaimed. "Something unusual is up, too."

"Hullo, minute men!" the hired man was yelling. "Come up to the Morse house, quick!"

"This way," went on Roger, his face growing pale, and off he started, with the other lads at his heels. There was the brook to pass and a row of low pear-trees, and then they came up to Hen, standing at the corner of the barn.

"What is it, Hen?" questioned Roger, quickly.

"Roger, whar hev ye been? Come on up tew the house this minit," was the response.

"What's the trouble?"

"Thet ez what I want tew find out."

"Why, what on earth do you mean?" and Roger clutched Hen by the arm, for the hired man appeared to be more than half bewildered.

"Your mother an' sister air gone, Roger!"

"Gone! Where?"

"I dunno. I jes' ran up to the house from the milk-house, an' thar is every door wide open, and not a hair o' 'em to be seen anywhar!"

The youth waited to hear no more. As Hen had been speaking, they had been moving forward, and now he quickened his pace. With a bound he entered the kitchen, the door to which stood wide open, and, seeing nobody there, rushed through the remainder of the house.

"Mother! Dorothy!" he called, many times, but no answer came back; and again he went over the house, from cellar to garret, his heart beating violently, for there was no telling what dreadful thing had happened to the mother and sister who were so dear to him.

"It's a puzzler, ain't it?" queried Hen, as he and Roger came to a standstill in the centre of the sitting-room.

The other boys had now come up, followed

by several men, and the situation was quickly explained.

"I saw half a dozen redcoats around here not fifteen minutes ago," vouchsafed one of the minute men. "I believe they came up from the back road."

"And I saw some men near the back road a-carrying some bedding and blankets to a farm wagon," added another. "I reckon they were fitting the wagon up for an ambulance for their wounded."

Roger waited to hear no more, but ran to the hallway and mounted the stairs, three steps at a time. Entering first one and then another of the bedrooms, he saw what he had not noticed before, that a large quantity of the bedclothes was missing.

"They took our stuff!" he called out. "Nearly all of the pillows and blankets are gone. But that doesn't account for the disappearance of my mother and sister. I wouldn't care for the bedclothes, if only I knew they were safe."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

WHAT BECAME OF MRS. MORSE AND DOROTHY.

WHEN Roger and the others left the homestead to defend the milk-house and the powder stored therein, Dorothy lost no time in securing the place once more. Every door and window was closed, and then the girl turned her attention to her mother.

The invalid had suffered greatly from the shock caused by the Tories' attack, and now lay on a couch in a faint. It took the daughter the best part of half an hour to revive her, and, this done, she insisted that her mother should remain where she was.

"I can watch," she said. "I will reload the muskets, and, with Roger and the others so near, I am sure we will be safe."

"Pray God you speak the truth, Dorothy!" murmured Mrs. Morse. "Oh, that this cruel fighting were at an end! Hark! they are firing around the milk-house. Roger may be killed!"

"Hen will keep his eye on him, mother. Do not alarm yourself more than is absolutely nec-

essary," the girl went on, for she saw that her parent was on the verge of a second collapse.

The muskets were soon loaded and placed at convenient places, and after this there seemed nothing for Dorothy to do but to sit down and wait, — the hardest task in the world under such trying circumstances. She walked from one window to another, trying to catch sight of what was taking place at the milk-house and along the brook, but the trees of the orchard hid everything from view.

Presently the sounds of the firing seemed to move away, and finally they were lost in the distance. She returned to her mother's side.

"They have gone away, mother."

"I am thankful for it, child. If only Roger were here with us!" and the fond parent covered her pale face with her hands.

"You wouldn't have him shrink from his duty, would you, mother?"

"No, no! But, oh, Dorothy, if he is shot —" the widow did not finish. To her, Roger was now what her former husband had been to her.

Suddenly a fearful crash on the rear door of the house startled both. Dorothy leaped to her feet as the crash was repeated, and ran for the nearest musket. Soon she was at the rear window overlooking the kitchen door. She saw four redcoats in the yard below.

"Stop that, or I will shoot at you!" she called out, and the British soldiers looked up in surprise.

"Excuse us, we thought the house vacated," said one, who wore the uniform of an under officer. "We are after some bedding for our wounded men. Will you be kind enough to give us a few pillows and blankets?"

The tone of the officer was very polite, but his face plainly indicated that he expected no refusal to his request. For the second Dorothy was nonplussed.

"Come, what do you say?" went on the officer, impatiently.

"Why don't you go to some people who are in sympathy with you?" faltered the girl, knowing not what else to say.

"We haven't time to pick out those who are faithful to the King, and those who are rebels," came the sharp answer. "But surely, such a fair-looking maiden as yourself will not refuse such a request as we have made."

"Dorothy! what do those men wish?" asked Mrs. Morse, feebly.

"They want bedding for their wounded soldiers, mother. If they wanted it for our men I wouldn't hesitate a second, but they want it for the English."

Mrs. Morse heaved a deep sigh. "Perhaps it would be best to let them have what they want. I

presume their wounded suffer as much as do our own, poor fellows!"

"I'll give them the bedding stored in the side room," answered the girl. She stepped again to the window. "Wait a moment, and you shall have what you want!" she called out.

"Let us come in and get it, — we will not harm you," returned the officer below.

But this Dorothy would not agree to. Rushing to the side room mentioned, she returned with several blankets and pillows, which, though worn, were still clean, and as good as any other for the purpose desired. With her arms full, she came to the window again, and threw the mass to the doorstep below.

"There you are, — that is all I can spare," she said.

"Humph! a fine lot this is!" cried one soldier. "Our men are not to put up with what these rebels have cast off."

"Open the door and let us pick out what we want!" cried another. "I'll wager they have better bedding than this by far."

"You had better open the door," said the officer, as he motioned to two of the soldiers to pick up what Dorothy had thrown out. "This is not enough for our purpose."

"It is all I have for you, sir," was the firm reply.

"Excuse me, but it is not, madam. As much as I hate to disturb so fair a maiden, I must insist upon it that you let us in. Remember, you have my promise that you shall not be harmed in the least. Our requests are absolutely necessary."

The officer was evidently a gentleman, but he was determined to have his way, and, upon additional urging from her mother, Dorothy at last opened the door, and the soldiers poured into the house. They were greatly surprised to behold the girl with a musket in her hands.

"Surely you would not shoot!" exclaimed the officer, a half-amused smile on his broad face.

"I will shoot, if you try to molest my mother or me," answered Dorothy, firmly. "Take what bedding you wish, and then begone."

"Do not take it so hard, madam," went on the officer. "I am not taking these things from you for pleasure. Your rebels have wounded a great number of our troops, and these we are bound to care for. We need the bedding, and also some liquor. Where do you keep the latter?"

"There is not a drop of it in the house. You can search for it, if you wish."

"I will take your word for it. Such a fair maiden as yourself would not tell a falsehood, I am certain."

The officer went up-stairs, and, finding Mrs. Morse lying down on one of the beds, told his men

not to disturb her. All of the other bedding, however, was taken, and the men went below again with their arms full to overflowing.

"I am very much obliged to you," said the officer, with a low bow to Dorothy. "As I said before, I am very sorry to have disturbed you, and it may be that some time we shall meet again under fairer circumstances. Forward, men, and be quick about it," and with a low bow, which, somehow, Dorothy could not help but return, he followed his men out into the dooryard, and in the direction of the back road.

Feeling a bit stronger, since no violence had been threatened them, Mrs. Morse had followed the redcoats down into the kitchen, and mother and daughter were so curious to learn what became of the men, that both walked out into the dooryard to watch the soldiers.

The men had disappeared, and they were about to return indoors, when the loud cry of a well-known Irish voice reached them, and a moment later Bridget McNally, who worked for the Darlys, came up on a run, her pudgy face full of fear, and her fiery red hair streaming down her back.

"Mrs. Morse! Dorothy!" she panted. "Phat in the worruld shall Oi do? A murdherin' rascal of a redcoat p'inted his gun through th' dinin'-room winder an' shot Mrs. Darly in' the shoulder! An' me an' the childer there alone wid her! She's



“SURELY YOU WOULD NOT SHOOT!” EXCLAIMED THE
OFFICER.”

loike wan dead on the flure, an' Oi don't know phat to do, so Oi don't!"

"Mrs. Darly shot!" gasped both mother and daughter, in a breath.

"Yis, shot! Bad cess to the murdherin' red-coat as did the wicked deed! But phat shall Oi do? She's on the flure loike wan dead, an' the three small childer a-cryin' their eyes out wid fear over her!" And the Irish woman wrung her hands in utter despair. She was a big creature, well able to take care of herself and others under ordinary circumstances, but the cruel and unexpected shot through the window had entirely unnerved her.

"You had better go over, Dorothy," said Mrs. Morse. "You know how to bind up a wound. I don't believe anybody will harm you on the way, although there is no telling what the British will do, they are so enraged over being driven back."

"Hadn't you better go along, mother? We will be safer all together. I cannot bear to think of leaving you alone," urged Dorothy; and so strongly did she plead, that Mrs. Morse consented to undertake the trip, although the Darly homestead was nearly a quarter of a mile away.

"If yez can't walk, Oi'll carry ye!" said Bridget McNally, anxious to show that she was willing to do anything, and before they had covered a great

distance, she had Mrs. Morse up on her shoulder and was moving along as though the load was no greater than a bundle of fagots or a sack of meal.

Their course was through one end of the orchard and along the edge of a bit of swamp land. The ground was uneven and soft, and both Dorothy and the Irish woman often sank up to their ankles in the mud.

When the Darly homestead was reached, all was silent about the place, the children having cried themselves still. Entering, they found that nothing had been disturbed during Bridget McNally's absence. Mrs. Darly lay where she had fallen, still in a faint, and the three small children, two girls and a boy, were huddled in a heap by the stove, holding tightly to each other for protection.

"O Bridget! Bridget! Mamma just threw her arm up!" cried the little boy. "Why don't she wake up all over?"

"Poor dears! We will help mamma all we can!" murmured Mrs. Morse, who was now once again on her feet. And she gathered the children about her, while Dorothy and the Irish woman raised the wounded woman and placed her on a couch.

It was soon ascertained that the shot had been a glancing one, entering the back of the left shoulder and coming out close to the top of the arm.

Although very painful, it was not dangerous, and, having applied some liniment, Dorothy bound it up with all of the skill at her command.

While the work of caring for Mrs. Darly was progressing, all in the house had heard a number of shots from the road, and from the woods back of the place. Scarcely had Dorothy's work been completed, and Mrs. Darly come to her senses, than the firing came nearer, and they heard the tramp of a score of feet close at hand.

"Sure an' thim redcoats are comin' back!" howled Bridget McNally, after a glance out of one of the windows. "Saints preserve us! There be a dozen of 'em, an' half a hundred of our minit min are followin' 'em up! Oh, hivens! phat shall we do,—the redcoats are comin' directly fur th' house!"

"Coming here—" began Mrs. Morse, when with a slam the kitchen door burst open, and there flocked into the room all of the British soldiers the Irish woman had mentioned. They carried smoking muskets in their hands.

"No one here but women and children!" cried their leader, a tall fellow, begrimed with powder and dirt. "Load up, boys, and give it to the rebels the moment they dare to come on. I reckon we can hold the house until our lieutenant comes up." And then the men began to reload their smoking muskets with all possible speed. As the

work progressed and a yell was heard from without, the leader turned to Dorothy.

"You women-folks and children are alone here, are you not?" he asked, hastily.

"Yes, but —" began the girl.

"I haven't any time to talk to you. Sit down, and don't any of you dare to stir a hand until I tell you. If you do, you will be killed on the spot!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

ROGER IS SHOT.

AFTER a long search around the house, both Roger and those with him came to the conclusion that, while the redcoats were ransacking the place for bedding, Mrs. Morse and Dorothy had fled to some other house for safety. But to where, was the question, and the youth returned to the doorway with both a troubled and an anxious look on his tired face.

"I did hope they would be safe," he said to Hen. "I wonder if they can be hiding in the vicinity?"

"We'll take a scoot around an' see," answered the hired man. "I'll go around tew the right, an' you kin go around tew the left. But be on yer guard ag'in them blamed Tories an' redcoats. We ain't clear o' 'em yet, even if most o' the troops air on their way to Menotomy."

Hen went off alone, while Roger started with Andy and Paul beside him. In the meantime, the men and the other boys scurried back to the vicinity of the milk-house, for some of the men had come up to get powder for the minute

men who were following up Lord Percy's retreat. In the excitement, Roger had forgotten all about his promise to obtain the powder, made earlier in the afternoon.

The three boys were moving along the western boundary line of the farm with extreme caution, when Paul presently called a halt.

"What's up?" asked Andy, in a whisper.

"I saw somebody moving behind yonder bushes. If I'm not mistaken he wore a bearskin hat, too."

"More redcoats," muttered Roger. "Will they ever leave the place? I suppose the word has been passed around that the powder is stored here, and they are flocking in like flies around a sugar bowl!"

"I see another hat!" came in suppressed excitement from Paul. "One, two, three, four, five! Boys, let us dust before we are surrounded!"

The words were still on his lips when, from out of the gloom under the trees, sprang the British soldiers Paul had counted. They came forward on a rush, using their guns as clubs in order to save their scanty stock of ammunition.

"Surrender, ye rebels!" cried the foremost, and aimed a blow at Paul's head. The boy leaped back, and the blow merely grazed his arm. Then Paul fired, and the redcoat staggered to one side, struck in the ear.

By this time the others in the party had come

up to Roger and Andy, and a fierce hand-to-hand struggle ensued. The British soldiers were getting the best of it, when a shout was heard from a distance, and up came several men, including Mr. Darly, who promptly laid one of the redcoats low with a bullet through his thigh.

"They are at the milk-house again!" exclaimed somebody, — who, it was impossible to learn, such was the confusion. "They are bound to have that powder if they can get it!"

"To the defence!" shouted Mr. Darly. "Paul, look out for yourself!" and off he rushed, the redcoats having meanwhile fallen back a hundred feet or more, carrying their wounded comrade with them. They would have retreated entirely, but reinforcements happened to come up, and once again the boys were attacked, this time with a vigour which amounted to nothing but savageness.

"At them! Cut the boys down!" came from the British leader, a burly fellow, twice Roger's size. "They have nearly killed Bretwood!"

As he gave the order, he came rushing directly at Roger, his musket aimed at the lad's head. There was a crack, and a flash of fire full in Roger's face, and down went our hero on his back, and knew no more.

Andy saw his chum go down, and his heart leaped into his throat. But there was no time to step to Roger's side, for two of the redcoats

were after the lad, one with a pistol, and the second with a sabre, and he was compelled to flee to save his life.

Paul also saw the youthful leader fall, and as the redcoats after Andy, and the others of the enemy, moved away from the spot, he rushed up and bent over the prostrate form.

"Roger! Roger! Are you dead?" he asked, hoarsely. "Speak to me, and tell me you are only wounded." And then, as there was no reply, and Roger did not move, he gave a deep groan. "He is a goner. Poor, dear fellow!" And Paul arose in the deepest anguish of his life, for Roger had been his best friend.

There was no time to linger longer. More of the enemy appeared to be springing up at every hand, and, with a last look at the motionless figure, Paul hurried away, trembling so from emotion he could scarcely reload his empty musket as he went.

It was not long before the boys came together again, Andy having easily outdistanced his enemies in a run under some low-branched pear-trees. He was all out of breath, yet his first question was concerning Roger.

"He is dead," almost sobbed Paul. "Oh, but this is the very worst of all!"

"Yes, yes! Where was he shot? I saw the flash of the gun almost in his face."

"Somewhere in the head. His face was covered with blood. What will Mrs. Morse and Dorothy say when they hear of it?"

"There is no telling if they are safe, Paul. Come on, we had better join the men, for I am pretty sure that those redcoats are preparing for a stronger attack than ever on the milk-house."

Away went the lads through the orchard, their guns ready for use and their eyes on the alert for the merest glance at an enemy. Both were worn out and wet through with perspiration, and their nerves were at such a tension it was a wonder that they did not collapse under the strain. As a matter of fact, many of the minute men and boys did collapse when it was all over and they felt that they could rest on their arms.

The first man they encountered was Randolph Small, who had been along the road with the minute men under Captain Parker, but who had now come over to see if Roger had secured the military stores as he had promised. But Mr. Small was too busy to listen to what the boys had to say. There were British soldiers and Tories in front and on both sides, and soon the boys found themselves hard pressed and fighting as valiantly as before. Powder and ball were running low on both sides, and the battle was very largely of the Donnybrook Fair order, with muskets and

swords for clubs, and many a broken head to tell the tale later.

"I think you boys had better be getting out of this; it is altogether too warm for lads of your years," said one old minute man, as he fell back to the shelter of a number of trees, where the enemy could not reach him from behind. "I declare, this knocks the storming of Louisburg hollow!"

"We're going to remain as long as we can stand up," answered Andy, as he brushed the sweat and dirt from his forehead with his finger. "I wonder what a fellow would do if this were July instead of April."

"Both sides would have to take it easier, or be done up by sunstroke," rejoined Paul. "But I wouldn't care a bit if only Roger hadn't been killed."

"Are you speaking of Roger Morse?" demanded the minute man, and, told that they were, he shook his head dolefully. "Too bad! He's the most manly boy in these parts. Takes after his father, whom I knew well during the war in Canada."

Shortly after this, the boys found Mr. Winthrop, who was on his way to the milk-house to secure twenty-five pounds of the powder for the men on the road. A dozen men and boys were with Dick's father, and Andy and Paul joined the party. They

had gone but a short distance when they came face to face with a body of redcoats and Tories, who were running as if their very lives depended upon it.

In the gathering darkness, some of the patriots and the enemy ran directly into one another, and a rough and tumble skirmish ensued. But though the fighting was warm, it lasted but a minute. The redcoats and their supporters seemed fearfully anxious to get away, and, once able to do so, they lost no time in putting distance between themselves and the spot where the powder was stored. Not dreaming of what the British had done, the patriots continued on their way to the milk-house, Mr. Winthrop, as before, leading the way.

As the party drew closer to the structure, Paul saw a flash of fire on the ground, near the brook, and called Mr. Winthrop's attention to it. It was the burning of damp powder. The minute man gave it a close look, and saw that the blaze was creeping swiftly towards where the powder must be lying.

"Back ! back !" he yelled, and hurled those beside him to the rear. "Back for your lives ! The British have applied a slow-match ! The milk-house is about to blow up !"

CHAPTER XXX.

A QUESTION OF NERVE.

THOUGH stunned and wounded by the firing of the British soldier directly in his face, Roger was not killed. The leaden messenger of death passed over his left temple, while the grains of burnt powder settled in many parts of his face. A wild glare of fire shot through his brain, and then he knew no more.

When he came to his senses he found himself on the opposite side of the brook, in a tiny hollow sheltered by a clump of elderberry bushes. He was resting in the arms of Hen, who had brought him hither.

"Roger, Roger, ye ain't dead, air ye?" the faithful Vermonter was saying. He had bathed the youth's wound and bound it up with a strip torn from the sleeve of his shirt.

"Oh!" came in a low moan, and then the boy's eyes opened and he stared about him. "Where — where — Hen —"

"The Lord be praised!" murmured the hired

man. "I thought the tarnal redcoats hed done ye up. By gum, but it war a close call, lad!"

"I suppose so," gasped Roger. "But — but where am I? Is the battle over?"

"Here we air, at the upper end o' the brook. No, the fightin' ain't over, an' I calkerlate 'twon't be afore ter-morrer, if our men an' the ammunition hold out."

For several minutes Roger felt too weak to ask any more questions. He lay perfectly quiet in Hen's arms, wondering if he could get up and go on or if he would have to be carried to the house and put to bed. A brace of shots from close by aroused him.

"Hen, hadn't we better be moving?" he asked. "If they catch us here —"

"I'd take you tew the house, only this orchard is chuck full o' redcoats an' Tories, Roger. Howsomever, I guess I hed better try it. I'll take ye on my shoulder."

"Don't go if it's too dangerous, Hen," interposed Roger. "You can't fight when you are carrying me. Put me in some out-of-the-way corner and go on alone."

"An' leave you, lad? Not fer the world, an' King George's crown thrown in. By gum, Roger, wot do you think o' me ennyway?" added Hen, reproachfully. "Didn't I promise yer maw tew stick by ye? An' even if I hadn't —"

"I know you, Hen. A more faithful man never lived. But the fight must go on, and our side needs all the men to be had."

"They'll hev tew excuse Hen Jeremiah Charityfer-All Peabody fer a spell, even so, Roger. I calkerlate ez how I did putty near my share o' fightin' since this mornin'. I can't count up all the shots I've fired, or all the redcoats ez lost thar interest in fightin' through me."

While Hen was speaking, a crashing through some bushes above them caught Roger's ear. He clutched the hired man's arm, and whispered to him to be silent.

"The old Nick take the milk-house!" came in the voice of a British officer. "We'll blow it up!"

"That's the talk," was the reply, and Roger and Hen recognised the tones of Uriah Bedwell. "To destroy it will be better than to leave that powder behind."

"We must hurry about it, though," continued the officer. "Lord Percy's troops are already on the march for West Cambridge."

"Oh, that you should be compelled to retreat!" groaned Uriah Bedwell. "After this it will be no longer safe for us to live here. We will have to fly to Boston with you."

"That's right, ye will!" muttered Hen. "We'll hev no room fer Tories arfter sech slaughter ez this!"

The British officer, Bedwell, and several others had passed over the brook, when an alarm from another part of the orchard caused them to fall back. One of the number, evidently more timid than his companions, sought the hollow for protection, and Roger and Hen were discovered.

"Here are a couple of the rebels!" shouted the redcoat, when Hen leaped up and knocked him flat with the butt of his gun. Then, as the others advanced, he opened fire, and a Tory who resided at Concord fell, shot through the knee.

Seeing Hen and Roger were alone, and that the boy was in no condition to fight, the British soldiers and their allies now surrounded the pair and called on them to surrender.

"Never!" yelled Hen. "Take thet, ye goodfer-nuthin' skunk!" and another blow from his gun laid Uriah Bedwell flat on his back. But now two men pounced on the Vermonter from behind, and he was thrown down and disarmed. Not satisfied with their work, the redcoats in their rage kicked and cuffed him, until poor Hen lay insensible, the blood flowing from a dozen wounds.

"So, Roger Morse, we meet again!" sneered Uriah Bedwell, as soon as he was up and could speak. "You ought to be shot dead!"

"The same might be said of you, sir," answered the youth, with as much spirit as he could command.

"Don't talk to me!" roared the Tory. "You helped burn my house down!"

"I did not. I didn't know it was burned until a short while ago."

"Don't lie to me. I know better. You — you —"

"We can't waste time in talking, Bedwell," interrupted the British officer. "Come along, if you are going."

"This boy is the greatest rascal in Lexington," answered the Tory. "He helped Paul Revere spread the alarm, helped burn my house, and helped rob Sergeant Kegan and his men of their arms and their foot-wear."

"Pitch him into the milk-house, then," was the brutal suggestion. "It will be a prime way of getting rid of him."

"I'll do it!" came from the thin, set lips of Uriah Bedwell. "It will teach these rebels who have destroyed my property a lesson. Some one help me carry him."

"Let go of me!" ejaculated Roger. He tried to break away, but in his weakened condition he was no match for his enemies. In his struggles the bandage was torn from his head, causing his wounds to bleed afresh, and suffering from another loss of blood, he became unconscious once more.

Uriah Bedwell and two soldiers picked him up, and in a minute more the milk-house was reached.

The soldiers were stationed around it so that the enemy might not surprise them at their work. Then the officer and two of the Tories went inside, to fix the slow-match which was to blow the improvised magazine to atoms.

While the others were at work with wet powder and waste, a fiendish look crossed Uriah Bedwell's features.

"He sha'n't escape, even if he does come to," he muttered between his yellow and snaggy teeth. "I'll bind him fast!"

He hunted around in vain for a rope. But there was a thin iron chain handy, and one end of this was placed around Roger's chest, under the armpits, and the other end made fast to a corner post of the stone and wooden structure.

"The explosion will scatter that chain everywhere," thought Bedwell, "and no one will know but that Morse was killed through his own carelessness or rashness."

The slow-match laid and made ready for firing, the soldiers and Tories withdrew, leaving the head of the party to do the touching off. It was now that an alarm sounded from the vicinity of the road, and all knew they must get away or be cut off from the main body of the troops, and more than likely annihilated.

"There she goes!" cried the British soldier, as he struck a flint and steel, set fire to the tinder

in his box, and allowed a spark to drop on the wet powder. There was a splutter and a flash, and the fire began to creep towards the milk-house with surprising quickness.

"Good-bye to that powder and to Roger Morse!" muttered Uriah Bedwell, and, turning, he followed the soldiers in their flight towards the road.

It was this body of men who fell in with the minute men and the boys under Mr. Winthrop, as already described. Uriah Bedwell, however, was too much of a coward to take part in the fray. He ran off to the right, and, keeping close watch in the dark, managed to reach the road to West Cambridge without being molested. It was the last that was seen of him in those parts for some time to come.

In the meantime, Roger lay in the corner of the milk-house, totally unconscious of his fearful peril. The long slow-match kept burning closer and closer, until the sputtering flames were just outside of the door. Within two yards lay a sack containing twenty-five pounds of powder, while all of the other sacks were just behind it.

With a shudder the youth sat up and opened his eyes, swollen and covered with blood. At first he realised nothing but that he was wounded, that his head ached as if it were ready to split, and that a curious fire was dancing before his vision.

Suddenly he realised where he was. At the same instant he knew, too, that the curious fire was not imaginary, but real. His discovery sent a cold chill to his young heart, brave as it was.

"They are going to blow me and the milk-house up!" he thought. "Oh, the atrocious villains!"

Summoning all his strength, he sought to gain his feet, that he might stamp out the slow-match or run for his life. Weak as he was, he might have arisen, had the chain not held him. He put his hand on his breast and found how he had been made a prisoner.

With a superhuman strength born of the peril of the moment, he jerked at the chain several times, and loosened it so that he could move forward about a foot, but no farther. This brought his feet within reach of the nearest bag of powder, that which had been cut open to communicate with the lighted train.

The slow-match was now less than a yard long, and in a few seconds more it would reach the end, and then all would be over.

"Oh, heaven help me!" burst from the boy's lips. With his foot he kicked the bag of powder away. But this action spilled a quantity of the explosive stuff on the milk-house floor, so he was no better off than before.

The flash of the slow-match lit up the interior of the milk-house, and close at hand, on a hook,

Roger saw a milk dipper, with a long handle. He pulled the dipper down, and, with the cup end, commenced to scoop the powder away from the oncoming fire.

It was work that required extraordinary nerve. It must be accomplished in a few seconds, and the powder must be gotten away clean, for a few specks left behind would ruin everything.

In feverish haste he hauled and scraped, digging the dipper into the dirt flooring that not a grain of the explosive material might escape him. Nearer and nearer crept the light, and the youth prayed as he had never prayed before, that it might go out. Then came a splutter and a flash, and he closed his eyes.

The next second was an eternity to Roger. His heart stopped beating, and the dipper dropped with a rattle to the floor. Why didn't the explosion come? He opened his eyes and stared wildly into the darkness. The slow-match had burnt itself out. He was saved! He uttered a wild shriek of relief, and then once more his senses forsook him.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE END OF THE FIGHTING. — CONCLUSION.

HELTHER-SKELTER into the orchard drove the men and boys who had accompanied Mr. Winthrop to the scene of the thrilling incident just recorded. All had seen the flashes of the slow-match, and all expected a shot which would shake the neighbourhood for miles around.

But, safe behind the trees, they waited in vain for the shock to come. The light from the slow-match was lost to view in the interior of the little structure containing the powder, and nothing but silence followed.

"It must have gone out," cried Andy, drawing a deep breath. "Let us go and see."

"Be careful, — there may be only a temporary delay!" shouted Mr. Winthrop, and he insisted on it that all should hold back for several minutes longer.

At last they crept forward, using extreme caution, and ready to turn at the first intimation of danger. But nothing came to alarm them, and Mr. Winthrop finally lit a candle-lantern taken from the barn, to make a thorough investigation.

"Roger Morse!" he cried, and the call brought all of the others to his side. "Look, look! the poor lad is nearly dead, but he saved the powder from going off!"

"He is chained!" burst from Paul's lips. "Oh, what fiendish work!"

The sufferer was speedily released and carried out into the open. Then a broom was procured, and the loose powder swept together and bagged again, after which the floor of the milk-house was drenched with water. The latter work had just been concluded when a faint cry was heard from up the brook.

"Roger! Roger! Where are you?"

"It is Hen Peabody!" ejaculated Paul. "Hen, come down to the milk-house!" he called back.

A loud grunt of pain was the only answer. Alarmed for the welfare of the hired man, who was well liked by all of the minute boys, Andy and Paul sped to his side, to find Hen crawling on his hands and knees, too weak to stand erect. Claspings hands, the boys made a "chair" for the sufferer to sit in, and thus they carried him to where Roger had been left.

While this was going on, a loud shouting was heard on a side-road, back of the Morse home-
stead, and, curious to learn what the new difficulty was, half a dozen men sped away in that direction. The shouting came closer, and a few minutes

later, three men were seen to be sneaking through the lower end of the orchard, pursued by an equal number of minute men. The retreating individuals were Deacon Marston and two other Tories.

"Thar's Deacon Marston!" gasped Hen, pointing his long finger in the direction. "Stop him, Mr. Winthrop. Ef I ain't mistook, he robbed your house o' a jewel-casket!"

"Ha!" muttered the farmer. "Halt, Marston, or I'll fire at you!" Marston had not seen the party near the milk-house, and the unexpected command nearly paralysed him. He advanced a few steps further, halted, and then started to retreat.

"Halt, I say!" called Mr. Winthrop again, and as the Tory paid no attention, the minute man took aim and pulled the trigger. A yell of pain rent the night air, and Marston went down, shot in the thigh.

As Mr. Winthrop and some of the others came running up, Andy observed Marston in the act of throwing some square object behind a clump of bushes.

"I'll wager that's the casket," he cried, and went after the object. He was right, and the treasure-box was passed over to Mr. Winthrop. Later on its contents of jewelry and money were found to be intact.

In their eagerness to catch Marston, no one

had paid any attention to the two Tories, and they escaped unmolested. This incident wound up the fighting in the vicinity of the Morse homestead, and a short while later Roger and Hen were carried to the house, to be tenderly cared for by a number of their friends. In the general excitement, Marston was forgotten for a few minutes, and during that time he managed to crawl to the roadway, where he hailed a passing horseman, who took him up in the saddle, under the impression that he was an unfortunate minute man. Marston told the stranger that he belonged to Bedford, beyond Lexington, and offered a nice sum of money to be carried to the home of a physician of that village. In this manner he managed, for the time being, to escape arrest and conviction. However, both he and Uriah Bedwell were heard of later on, much to their own discomfiture.

While the fighting had been going on around the Morse homestead, Mr. Darly, anxious to know how matters were at his house, had hurried homeward, to find a body of British defending themselves from the inside, as partly described in another chapter. He had called on several friends to come to the aid of the minute men located around the dooryard, and an attack on the house followed. Two of the redcoats were slain, a minute man was severely wounded, and then the British sought safety in flight, after smashing all of the dishes

and nearly all of the furniture in their rage. During the fight, the women-folks carried Mrs. Darly up-stairs, and followed with the children, and all escaped injury. As told before, the wound received by Mrs. Darly was a trifling one, and before long she was as well as ever. As soon as they felt safe to do so, Mrs. Morse and Dorothy went home, where they immediately turned all of their attention to the injuries received by Roger and Hen. Some neighbours brought in some bedding, and the sufferers were made as comfortable as possible, and then a number of the men and boys went off to continue the fight.

Of all the encounters and horrors which took place after the retreating British soldiers left Lexington, it is perhaps best that but little be said. It is a matter of history that just beyond Lexington two houses were burned, and also a barn containing some cattle. Here the redcoats halted for a short but needed rest.

At West Cambridge another skirmish took place, the minute men firing from a turn in the road and from a temporary shelter made of bundles of shingles. This maddened the worn-out and defeated troops, and they ruthlessly butchered Jason Russell, an invalid, in his own house. They also broke into all the cottages that were handy, demanding food and drink, and, whenever their requests were not granted on the spot, they demolished the furni-

ture, shot and stabbed the inhabitants, and in several instances applied the torch.

The loss on both sides had been frightful, but the patriots had the advantage over their enemies in caring for their wounded, for they could be carried to the neighbouring houses, where local physicians ministered to their wants. For a long time the British endeavoured to carry their wounded with them, but at last the number became too great, and they took possession of a house in West Cambridge and turned it into a hospital. The hospital flag was hung over the doorway, regimental doctors were placed in possession, and, to the honour of the patriots, they were left in undisputed possession of the place.

Finally, shortly after nightfall, Charlestown was reached. As the British troops swarmed into the town, they received what Lord Percy afterwards declared was the hottest fire of the day. The enemy were now under the protection of the British warships lying in the harbour. The minute men and militia were eager to pursue them still further, but the wiser heads considered it best to withdraw, and at last the patriots did so, hurrahing as they went, and the battles of Lexington and Concord were at an end. As one of our most able historians has said, these contests should have been called the battles of the minute men, for it was the minute men and the minute boys who fought them,

not the militia afterwards so hastily organised to set our country free.

Roger's wounds, though painful, were not serious, and inside of a week, although he still carried his head in a bandage, he felt almost as well as ever. Hen, too, was not badly crippled, and got around as quickly as his young and much beloved master.

The minute boys had suffered some, but nobody was killed, and that was much to be thankful for. As has been related, the British lost a large number, and among those found dead on the road and in the fields were Sergeant Kegan, Patten, and Yorston. The three corpses were afterwards shipped with others to Charlestown for burial.

But here properly ends the story of the "Minute Boys of Lexington." How Roger and the other boys, accompanied by the ever faithful Hen, went forth to fight at Bunker Hill and at the siege of Boston, and how Roger managed at a later day to deliver to the British lieutenant's widow the precious papers entrusted to his care will be told in another volume, to be entitled "The Minute Boys of Bunker Hill." For the time being, all were joyous in the knowledge that the first stroke for liberty had not been without its measure of victory, and here we bid them farewell.

THE END.

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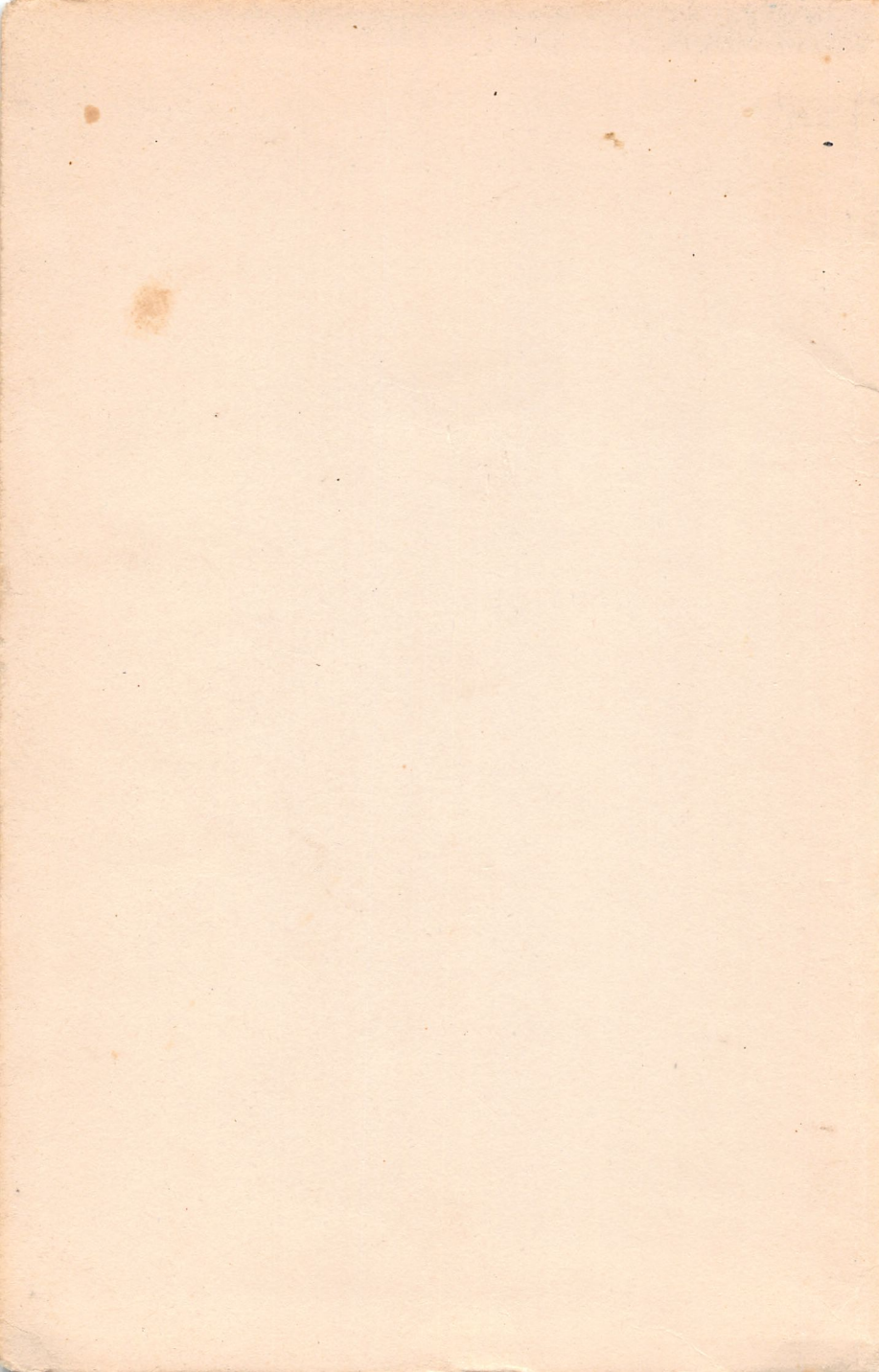
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